

Walsall & Willenhall CHRONICLE

Thursday, December 14, 2017

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OWNER OF DOG WITH DREADLOCKS WEIGHING 2KG GETS PET BAN



Various views of Poppy, with her matted fur

THE owner of a dog whose fur was severely matted after years of neglect has been banned from keeping animals for life.

Paul Padmore, of Kipling Road, Willenhall, admitted failing to meet the needs of Yorkshire terrier Poppy in front of Birmingham magistrates. Padmore had not groomed or brushed Poppy the whole time he owned her, the RSPCA said.

The magistrates court was told the RSPCA became involved after a member of the public contacted the animal charity with concerns about Poppy's welfare. When RSPCA inspector Beth Boyd visited the home, she said she was shocked by the state of 13-year-old Poppy.

Inspector Boyd said: "Poppy was com-

pletely covered in dreadlocks on every part of her body - she was even struggling to walk because of all the dreadlocks. Padmore admitted he had never brushed or groomed her the whole time he had her, which was years.

"Not only was her fur in a poor condition, but also her claws were overgrown. Initially she was quite aggressive but as soon as we got her to a vet her temperament changed completely and she became gentler to handle. She was clearly very uncomfortable."

The dreadlocks were sheared off her at the vets, and in total the amount of fur which came off her was around 2kg.

Some of the dreadlocks were around 13.5 inches in length. Inspector Boyd said: "This

was purely long-term neglect. There is no excuse for a dog to be left in this condition. It would have made her quality of life virtually non-existent."

Poppy was signed over into the RSPCA's care and rehomed to a loving new owner.

But just weeks after moving to her new home, Poppy developed a serious spinal injury and had to be put to sleep. "It's sad that she died so soon after going to a new home, but she spent her last few weeks with a loving owner," said Inspector Boyd.

As well as being disqualified from keeping animals for life, 58-year-old Padmore was given a six-week community order and ordered to pay costs of £100 and an £85 victim surcharge.

COMMUNITY

Saddlers team light up hospice in visit

WALSALL FC players and manager Jon Whitney took time out to turn on the Christmas lights at a local hospice.

The Saddlers boss took along assistant manager Ian Sharps, captain Adam Chambers and players Joe Edwards and James Wilson to Fair Oaks Day Hospice on Goscote Lane to speak with residents and get the Christmas season under way by switching on the festive lights. It is the second time that the club has sent players to the hospice and comes ahead of the team's visit to Walsall Manor Hospital today, Thursday.

Adam Davy, community director at Walsall FC Community Programme, who helped organise the visit, said: "We would like to thank everyone at Fair Oaks for their help with the visit and wish everyone there a very Merry Christmas."

Walsall boss Jon Whitney at the hospice



Purpose-built site to replace 'outdated' surgeries NEW £8m HEALTH CENTRE REVEALED

HEALTH bosses have this week revealed, for the first time, an artist's impression of how Walsall's controversial new £8 million health centre will look.

Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group is looking to close four 'outdated' GP practices in the borough and relocate them into a new, bigger, purpose-built site where historic saddlemaker Jebez Cliff used to stand on Lower Forster Street.

The site was demolished in 2014 and plans for the new health centre have come under fire, but are looking likely to go ahead, with bosses firmly behind the scheme. A new consultation on the plans was launched alongside the illustration.

Improve

Dr Martin Stevens, GP partner at Lichfield Street, Sycamore House and The Limes surgeries said: "We have developed an exciting proposal to relocate the surgeries to a brand new, purpose-built facility in Lower Forster Street. We believe that moving to larger, modern premises will significantly improve the environment for patients and staff, and help us to improve services."

"Bringing a range of organisations under one roof and increasing the size of the practices will mean

By Jordan Harris

we will be able to cater for the long term population growth and also help care for our ever growing ageing population.

"I would encourage patients at all four practices to have their say on the proposal."

Deirdre Pedley, chairman of the patient representation group at Saddlers Medical Centre, said: "It is very important that all patients from all four surgeries take the time to share their views on these plans. I would encourage everyone affected to spare some time and have your say."

A leaflet with information about the scheme is available to pick up at any of the four practices or via walsallccg.nhs.uk/be-involved/engagement-consultation



The artist's impression of the new purpose-built health centre to replace four GP surgeries

EMERGENCY

Road closes after blaze hits building

A ROAD was closed following a fire at a three-storey building in Walsall.

Flames took hold on the first floor of the property on Corporation Street in Caldmore, which was closed off by police for safety precautions on Monday morning.

Firefighters forced entry into the site in order to tackle the flames.

A West Midlands Fire Service spokesman said: "There was a severe fire in a first-floor flat of a three-storey commercial and domestic building."

"We forced entry to a ground-floor shop by removing ground-floor shutters."

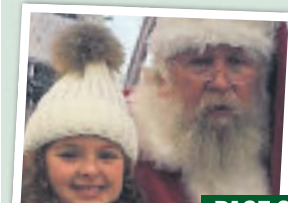
"All persons were accounted for. The cause of the fire was electrical."

No-one was trapped or injured. A total of 40 firefighters attended in eight fire engines.

The alarm was raised at 5.09am when the temperature was at -4C.

INSIDE

SLEIGH SANTA ROUND STREETS



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The Battle of Yorks Bridge returns



Yorks Bridge over the canal

THE Battle of Yorks Bridge has reared its head again with a council set to go back to war with residents over building a new controversial bridge over the Essington and Wyrley Canal.

The plans to build a new bridge next to the narrow old 1800s one were thrown out by the Secretary of State in 2015 because it could encroach on common land in Pelsall. And some residents objected saying they would rather see works done to the old bridge than a new one built. But now Walsall Council has put the £1.9 million scheme back on the table saying the 1800s-built bridge is not suit-

able for modern traffic. Since 1999 there have been 10 reported accidents and 16 casualties with the authority stating the lack of a footway puts cyclists and pedestrians at risk.

Deputy leader Councillor Lee Jeavons said: "The existing Yorks Bridge dates back to the 19th century and its structure has suffered over recent decades.

"Its brick arch construction, poor alignment and lack of footways make it unsuitable for modern traffic and given how busy that road is it's equally unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists. It's one of our priorities to transform the infra-

structure in Walsall and this scheme is a really important part of that."

Planning chiefs hope to save the existing historic bridge, in Norton Road, plus use additional land from the common for the new bridge and widen the road.

The original project was given the nod by the council's planning committee in 2014 despite objections by residents who want the old bridge to be renovated.

Pelsall Heritage Group and residents objected on the grounds that the council had failed to consider an alternative option to carry out specialist strengthening work to the humpback bridge.

Spotlight on 'lawless' town at crunch talks

PEOPLE and traders living in fear after a crime surge in their town grilled council bosses, police and their MP at a crunch meeting.

Willenhall has previously been labelled 'lawless' after a surge in crime, including a ram raid at a supermarket and robberies at Poundland.

A meeting was held at Willenhall Chart Centre on Gomer Street to discuss how the crimewave can be tackled. Simon Futcher, head of security for Poundland nationally, said that one robbery at the Willenhall town centre store saw staff tied up and has left them fearing opening up.

Addressing a bench consisting of Councillors Diane and Sean Coughlan, MP Eddie Hughes and sergeant Harjinder Cheema of Willenhall Police team, Mr Futcher said: "Statistically, the Willenhall Poundland is the worst for crime out of any in the country."

"There have been robberies there over recent months and one has left staff who were tied up emotionally scarred, it has had a real lasting effect for them and their families. I understand that police resources are stretched more than ever but these staff are fearing for their safety every morning when they open up."

Residents also voiced their concerns over drink driving, drug dealing and muggings. Sgt Cheema said the public needed to work with police to help them find the culprits and added that patrols had been stepped up in the town over recent weeks.

He said: "We have had a positive response from the community after increasing patrols. We need to work together to do this and we can only work from the information we are given."

Councillor Sean Coughlan, who represents the town and is leader of Walsall Council, said the authority has invested in covert cameras to catch fly-tippers and is investing more cash into upgrading CCTV across the borough.

It's a knockout switch-on at Manor



Turning on the Christmas lights were boxers Martin Gethin, left, and Ben Whittaker, right, with Richard Kirby

PATIENTS, visitors and staff at Walsall Manor Hospital had a ring-side view when local hero, boxer Martin Gethin, switched on their Christmas tree lights.

The IBF Super Lightweight Champion and former British Champion is a patron of Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust's charity, Well Wishers, and supports events throughout the year - manning charity stalls and visiting patients.

Martin, who earlier this year helped to organise a charity boxing night for Well Wishers bringing in £2,500, said: "Being asked to switch on the lights at the Manor Hospital is one of the highlights of my career; it's right up there with winning the Championship."

"I am really happy to have been asked and happy to support Walsall Healthcare. I have visited the hospital a number of times over

the last year, and am conscious that many people will be spending Christmas in hospital this year."

He was joined by GB Podium Boxer, Ben Whittaker - another loyal supporter of the charity, and the trust's chief executive Richard Kirby for the switch-on. Mr Kirby thanked staff for their hard work over the year, and for the many improvements that they have achieved in patient care in 2017.

More times to see GPs available in scheme

EXTRA GP appointments will be available in Walsall this winter.

The extra out-of-hours slots will be opened up from Saturday December 23 and be in place until April.

People will be able to book to see a GP at Darlston Health Centre, Pinfold Health Centre and Broadway Medical Practice, between the times of 6.30pm to 9pm on weekdays, 10am to 3pm on weekends and 11am to 1pm on bank holidays including Christmas Day.

But Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group has stressed that the practices are not walk-in centres and appointments must be booked. A dedicated telephone number has been set up for people to book which is 01922 501 999.

Dr Anand Rischie, Chair of NHS Walsall CCG said: "We understand that it can be difficult to get a GP appointment during the winter months, especially over the Christmas period."

"To help our patients Walsall GPs have worked together to create this pilot scheme."

"It is also important that patients understand this service is available through appointments only and that our Urgent Care Centres and A&E Department will be open as normal for people with serious or life threatening emergencies."

Community officer praised

A COMMUNITY officer whose work has helped reduce anti social behaviour has been given an award.

Sarah Heath, a community protection officer with Walsall Council has received



Sarah awarded

a Chief Constable Award from West Midlands Police for her work to tackle bad behaviour in the Leamore and Birchills area.

Sarah had direct involvement in securing a Public Spaces Protection Order for the area, the first in the borough of Walsall, which helped give police greater powers to deal with problems.

Chief Constable Dave Thompson has said that the order has led to fewer anti-social behaviour incidents being recorded and thanked Sarah for her willingness to 'embrace new ideas and concepts'.

After receiving the award, the community protection officer said: "I feel really honoured to have received such a prestigious award and know there aren't many presented from the Chief Constable of the Police for the work that they do. However, this was very much a team effort."

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Two colleges set to merge as part of funding bid

WALSALL College and Walsall Adult Community College are set to merge together.

A Walsall Council cabinet meeting was due to discuss the possibility of the two colleges becoming part of the main college in a bid to get greater access to funding last night, Wednesday.

In August 2015, the council agreed that Walsall Adult Community College could establish itself as independent from the local authority in terms of how it was run, but the council remained owner of the organisation.

Now the council will consider the proposal that WACC and Walsall College formally join in March 2018, with WACC still continuing to run from its Hawbush Road site.

Excellent

The decision has been put forward due to changes in the way adult and community learning is being funded nationally.

Councillor Aftab Nawaz, portfolio holder for children's services and education said: "I believe the coming together of Walsall's highest quality training providers would be an excellent opportunity to ensure there is a strong and sustainable future for high quality skills and adult community learning provision which will benefit the residents and business of Walsall."

"It is a priority of this council to ensure local people have the skills and knowledge to enter and progress in work and so Walsall Council would work with the new joined entity to secure new investment for both the learning infrastructure and learning provision."

MP's joy as views sought on camps

ALDRIDGE MP Wendy Morton has spoken of her 'delight' after persuading the Government to consult residents on how unauthorised traveller encampments can be dealt with.

Mrs Morton has sought assurances from government ministers that Walsall residents will have the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process for the Government's Call For Evidence consultation, which will act as a starting point for potential new plans to help councils deal with encampments.

After being assured by housing minister Alok Sharma MP that Walsall people will be included in the consultation, the Aldridge MP said: "Following a year in which there were unacceptable numbers of Unauthorised Encampments across Walsall Borough it is absolutely understandable that my constituents were at breaking point."

Ward remains shut due to norovirus



Norovirus warning – Manor hospital

NOROVIRUS has struck at Walsall Manor Hospital prompting a plea for visitors to stay away. The highly contagious winter vomiting bug broke out last Thursday affecting wards 7 for cardiology, 15 for general medicine and 16 for gastroenterology.

Manor Hospital chiefs said the issue has been resolved on two of the wards but remained a risk on ward 15. Patients are still on the ward but it has been closed for new admissions and transfers.

A statement from Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust said: "There are

confirmed incidents of norovirus at the Hospital, with one ward, ward 15 closed to patient admissions and transfers at this time, though the rest of the hospital is open.

"There has recently been a very slight increase in the number of cases of norovirus across the Walsall community and people in care homes and hospitals may be more susceptible to picking up bugs due to being ill or weak or elderly."

"We are asking people not to visit care homes and hospitals to see relatives or friends if they have sickness

and diarrhoea, or they have recently experienced these symptoms."

The trust also issued advice on how to combat against it. They added: "The most effective precaution against norovirus is to wash hands regularly with soap and water, and not just rely on hand gel."

"Anyone concerned about symptoms, should contact their GP by telephone, rather than just going to the practice or health centre."

"The nurse in charge can be contacted by calling the hospital's switchboard on: 01922 721172."

Winter wonder and woe as snow storms strike

HEAVY snow showers brought a winter wonderland for many – but cancellations and chaos for others.

Planes, trains and roads were brought to a halt as safety alerts were issued by police and ambulance chiefs on Sunday urging travellers not to make journeys unless they had to.

New Cross and Birmingham Heartlands hospitals had to take to Twitter urging owners of 4x4s to get in touch to help get nurses into work. The Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) put out the call at around 11am on Sunday – and by 1.30pm more than 50 volunteers had come forward.

Public transport was badly hit with National Express West Midlands making the decision at 10.30am to suspend all services across the region due to roads conditions, while National Rail cancelled numerous services.

Schools across the region stayed shut on Monday after the heavy snowfall.

Freezing temperatures followed the snow adding to the treacherous roads for traffic this week. Flights were cancelled on Sunday as Birmingham Airport staff worked to clear the runway.

Across the region children were building snowmen, sledging and enjoying a bonus day off school.

But numerous events were cancelled, including the second day of performances at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre's latest pantomime, Jack and the Beanstalk.

Volunteers at Severn Valley Railway slept at the station overnight to clear platforms and de-ice the tracks but were forced to cancel all Sunday's Santa Steam Specials due to the continuing snowfall and loss of power at Arley Station, where Santa's Grotto is located.

Dudley Zoo closed on Friday for several days while, over in Bewdley, the West Midlands Safari Park opened up for its Santa Safari the four-mile safari drive-through was closed.

Harry Potter fans expecting to travel from all over the region to the Genting Arena in Birmingham to see The Chamber of Secrets had to wait till lunchtime to find out the show was off.

Sir Ken Dodd's performance at the Wulfrun Hall was also postponed.



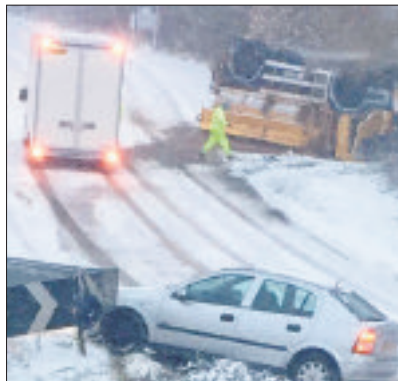
A council gritter on the move in Pelsall



Hednesford in the snow, pictured by John Hibbs



Staff work to clear the Walsall FC pitch on Saturday



Dramatic scene – a gritter overturned near Lichfield

NEWS IN BRIEF

Metro agrees £70 fare-jumping fine

PLANS to increase the penalty fare for passengers travelling on the Midland Metro without a ticket to £70 have been given the go-ahead.

The West Midlands Combined Authority, which owns the Metro, has signed off on the new penalty charge, which will see the maximum fine increase seven-fold.

The £70 charge will be reduced by half if paid within 21 days.

Councillor Roger Lawrence, lead member for transport for the WMCA, said: "When you consider a single ticket between Wolverhampton and Birmingham costs £4.10 the current £10 penalty offers no deterrent at all."

Slade's Don drums up support for pal

SLADE drummer Don Powell was helping mark a music shop's anniversary.

One Way Music, in Salop Street, Wolverhampton, held its 35th anniversary celebration this week.

Owner Mike Brookes invited his old school chum Don to preside over the official opening on Tuesday.

The celebration was also due to include a house warming for the recently fitted out shop premises.

Mike and Don also invited their old classmates from Etheridge Senior School to attend at the shop.

Give your views on combined surgery

RESIDENTS are being asked to share their views regarding plans to open a new health centre, which will result in four GP surgeries being based at one Walsall site.

The Walsall health plan proposes to move Lichfield Street Surgery, Sycamore House Surgery, The Limes Surgery and Saddlers Medical Centre into the new site, which would be built on Lower Forster Street.

Patients can collect a survey from their GP practice or attend a drop-in event at Lichfield Street Surgery on Saturday from 10am to 3pm.

Dickens reading to be recreated in city

MORE than 150 years ago Charles Dickens visited Birmingham to give his first ever public reading of A Christmas Carol.

That December night in 1853 will be conjured up by actor Clive Francis when he recreates A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens at the same venue, Birmingham Town Hall, on Sunday at 8pm.

Tickets start from £12.50, see www.thsh.co.uk or call 0121 780 3333.

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COUNTY NEWS

Willard to receive honorary degree

MICRO-SCULPTOR Willard Wigan will receive an honorary degree from the University of Warwick, it has been announced.

Willard will be made an Honorary Doctor of Letters by the university next year. The micro-artist, from Wolverhampton, crafts the world's smallest works of art and has been recognised in the Guinness Book of World Records. His works include miniature versions of athlete Usain Bolt and cartoon characters Pinocchio and Cinderella. The sculptor, who will receive the degree at a ceremony in January, was awarded an MBE for services to art in 2007.

Comic comes out to visit exhibit

BRUMMIE comic and rising TV star Joe Lycett has spoken of his pride at a new exhibition opening in his home city looking at the past five decades of sexuality. The ground-breaking 'Coming Out' exhibition marks the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of male homosexual acts in England and Wales.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery will feature works by celebrated artists including Andy Warhol, Francis Bacon and Grayson Perry. Lycett, who has appeared on shows including Live at the Apollo, Never Mind the Buzzcocks and 8 Out of 10 Cats, made a guest appearance at the launch.

Students join business group

SEVEN students from the Black Country have joined the 2017/2018 cohort of the Lloyds Bank Social Entrepreneurs Programme. The year-long programme offers financial support towards a social business to help solve some of the most pressing issues.

They include Lianne Cargill from Oldbury, Clive Corbett of Kingswinford, Omar Campbell of Walsall, Mandeep Singh, Chloe Dennis-Green, Gurinder Basson, all Wolverhampton and Lorna Phillip of Birmingham.

Samosa wins Indian food firm gold award

A GREAT Barr-based Indian food firm, co-founded by an Aston University student, has won a gold award for its vegetable samosa.

Sisters Geeta, 30, and Reena Salhan, 24, received the award in the 'food manufactured for food service' category for their business Green Sisters in the FreeFrom Eating Out Awards - who promote excellence in 'free from' food outlets for people with special diets.

Trolley good effort by former Goodyear staff



Celebrating a Good-year effort - trolley loads of food bought by former Goodyear workers at Blakemore Wholesale Unit, in Wolverhampton

FORMER Goodyear workers have spread some festive cheer by handing over a massive donation of £2,000 worth of food and toiletries to our Feed A Family This Christmas appeal.

This incredibly generous gift of more than 2,500 items will go towards helping families and individuals in need across the Black Country. Trol-

leys were loaded with everything from tins of vegetables, noodle pots and pasta to bottles of squash, long-life milk and jars of coffee.

There was also an array of sweet treats including chocolate selection boxes for youngsters and vital toiletries. Families with babies were also included with much-needed donations

of nappies and wipes among the items donated by the Goodyear workers 5/344 Transport and General Workers Union Benevolent Fund.

Bosses at Blakemore Wholesale in Wolverhampton helped the group to purchase their items during a sale so that their money could go further. It's almost 12 months since production

finished at Goodyear but chairman of the Unite branch Cyril Barrett, who worked at the site for almost 40 years, said: "We are creating a living legacy to the shopfloor workers who always worked hard and helped to raise this money." Deputy editor Diane Davies said: "The generosity of the Goodyear workers is overwhelming."

Bishop's blessing



Cycling legend Hugh Porter has been backing the appeal



Rug trader Doris Bradbury makes her contribution to the Feed A Family collection point at Anne Franks's pop up charity stall at Cannock market

THE Bishop of Dudley has spoken of the terrible struggles faced by families who are finding it difficult to put food on the table.

The Right Rev Graham Usher says he is aware of one heart-breaking example where a father had to ask his daughter to choose between celebrating her birthday or Christmas.

Thankfully, a food bank came to the rescue so that she could have both a birthday gift and be able to enjoy the festive season. The Bishop shared the story as he donated food towards the Express & Star and Chronicle's Feed A Family This Christmas appeal, which is aiming to help hundreds of families



Bishop of Dudley, Graham Usher

and the vulnerable across the Black Country and Staffordshire. And time is running out for donations, with the appeal finishing on Saturday.

He said: "Christmas is for many of us a wonderful time of family gatherings and eating and drinking too

much. It is rightly a time of joy and celebration. Amidst the fairy lights and tinsel that surround us there are families trying to live with difficult choices. Hard working families on low incomes who are struggling to make ends meet. Refugees who are confused having fled their homes. Elderly people who are frequently lonely.

"In recent weeks I've heard of women in a local refuge who, having fled domestic violence, applied for Universal Credit and have no money as they await the result."

The Bishop asked others to join him in supporting the Feed A Family appeal, joining a host of other notable Midlandsers including Wolverhampton cycling legend Hugh Porter, who has also backed the appeal

We are asking for gifts of festive

food, such as mince pies, chocolates and Christmas puddings, as well as basics like canned goods, long-life milk, fruit juice, pasta and rice.

Non-food items such as toiletries, baby supplies, new socks and small presents are also welcome during the appeal.

Meanwhile, generous members of the public have donated to Cannock market, at trader Anne Franks's pop-up stall.

Anne sells a variety of items each week for a different charity and has used this month to support the Feed A Family campaign. Customers and fellow traders have also given cat and dog food to ensure pets don't go without either. Anne said: "Everyone has been very kind."



THE DROP-OFF POINTS:

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DONATIONS CAN ALSO BE DROPPED OFF AT:

Waitrose Wolverhampton, Penn Road, WV2 4NJ; The Midcounties Co-operative Food Store Codsall, 28-32 Wood Lane/Bakers Way, Codsall WV8 1DB. Also at the Saddlers Centre in Walsall. Donations dropped off at those will go to The Well.

Junction 10 works will mean delays for 2 years

DRIVERS will face nearly two years of delays during the major revamp of the M6 junction 10, council chiefs have revealed.

The £65 million project to reduce congestion, which will see the two main bridges replaced and surrounding roads widened to increase capacity, could start as early as next winter.

But bosses have now revealed it will take around 98 weeks from start to finish, causing chaos for drivers using the route near Walsall and Wolverhampton. It will also mean more misery for Midlands motorway commuters, who currently face delays on the M5 close to the link with the M6.

Walsall Council's cabinet met on Wednesday to authorise officers to contact landowners about plots which will need to be acquired to expand the junction.

The council needs to take on two acres of land permanently and a further 2.5 acres temporarily.

But they will also need to create a temporary construction compound which will either be based at John Hill & Sons scrapyard off the Wolverhampton Road, or the industrial estate of Bloxwich Lane.

Councillor Angela Underhill, who represents Bentley and Darlaston North which contains the junction, hoped the disruption would be worth it in the long-term.

She said: "I am dreading the next couple of years but at least I know it is going to end."

New secondary school on hold

A NEW secondary school which will open in Blakenall has been pushed back by 12 months.

The Windsor Academy Trust, which will run the 1,150 free school, has now confirmed it will be called Swift Academy whilst stating that it will welcome its first students in September 2019 and not September next year as was originally hoped.

A consultation launched in November on the project and will run until January 22.

A site is yet to be agreed and the trust confirmed that is why the opening has been delayed.

Keith Sorrell, the chief executive officer of the trust, said: "We believe - and local parents tell us - that there is a clear need for more secondary provision in the Blakenall area of Walsall."

"It is hugely encouraging to see the number of really positive responses to our consultation."

Visit swiftacademy.org.uk for more information on Swift Academy.

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Millions to be invested in schools and roads

WALSALL'S council leader has spoken out in support of the authority's latest budget plans, pointing to investment in schools and highways as key steps for the borough.

At the cabinet meeting held yesterday, Wednesday, Walsall councillors considered a report on the Draft Capital Programme and Draft Revenue Budget update – how the council plans to invest in the borough and allocate funding over the next four years.

Millions of pounds worth of cuts have been included in the plan, however council leader Sean Coughlan has pointed to the investments the authority will make as crucial to improvements across the borough.

Councillor Coughlan said: “Although our revenue spend, or in other words the ‘day-to-day expenses’, is reducing, we are using capital funding in a strategic way to make our infrastructure and services more robust and sustainable for the future.”

“For example, we are looking to invest over £50m in our schools over four years to ensure children in Walsall have every opportunity to learn well and fulfil their potential.

“We are also proposing to invest over £27m in highways maintenance and road safety works during this time and, in partnership with Highways England, to deliver a £28.58m improvement scheme to J10 of the M6.”

It's futsal in the game at college

STUDENTS at Walsall College can now enjoy a game of growing sport futsal after receiving a donation of equipment. Walsall college has been given a set of futsal goals, balls, discs and bibs in a donation from the FA and Football Foundation.

The starter pack donations are designed to adapt existing sports halls, playgrounds and other hard surface facilities to make them futsal-ready.

Futsal is a five-a-side game, normally played on a flat indoor pitch with hockey-sized goals and a size four ball with a reduced bounce.

Michael Skubala, England Futsal head coach, said: “A big well done to Walsall College for securing a futsal starter pack – they have a bright future ahead of them now.”

College open day

WALSALL College is holding an open day on Saturday, January 20 from 10am - 2pm. It offers a range of courses, including business and computing. For more information, call 01922 657000.

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Happy Days! Bromford beats Homeserve



Homeserve staff in their uniforms

STEP aside Homeserve – Bromford is now officially the happiest place to work in the West Midlands – even beating the likes of Facebook and Apple.

The social housing company has overtaken its Black Country neighbour in a top 50 of the best places to work in the UK.

In the annual Employees' Choice Awards, recognising employers with 1,000 or more staff, the Wolverhampton-based housing association was ranked third overall.

Walsall-based HomeServe is in 10th

place, down from last year when Walsall's biggest private employer was also named third best in the UK to work for.

Bromford, founded in 1963, has its head office at Venture Court, Broadlands, is new to the top 50 this year.

It is ranked ahead of Facebook in fourth place and Apple. Google tops the table with Anglian Water in second place.

The rankings, part of a respected annual survey organised by jobs website Glassdoor, are determined entirely on anonymous reviews pro-

vided by employees. Bromford has 1,200 people working across the Black Country, Staffordshire, Birmingham and beyond.

Philippa Jones, Bromford's chief executive, said: “Being named by Glassdoor as one of the top three best places to work in the UK is a brilliant accolade – although we know there's plenty we still want to improve. It is testament to our colleagues really living the Bromford DNA, relishing the opportunity to deliver on our purpose, and making a difference to people's lives every single day.”

Central Library £4.3m revamp in the pipeline

WALSALL'S Central Library will close for 10 months as £4.3 million improvement work is carried out starting in February.

The 1906 landmark Edwardian building on Lichfield Street is set to be 'revitalised into a 21st century service' when the work is complete, which Walsall Council is claiming should be done by early November.

The library will shut its doors on December 23, with work starting on February 5.

A temporary library service will stay open in the town centre whilst the improvements are underway, located further up Lichfield Street to the former Town Hall restaurant site adjoining The Council House building.

This service will be open seven days a week, offering traditional library services for children and adults, as well as access to IT and computers. The idea of the work is to redesign the library to become a hub, incorporating the local history centre and archive as well as offering a cafe, ICT lounge and offer free wifi, among others.

Sunday

More good news for library users is that the libraries at Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston and Willenhall, as well as from Streetly Community Library will have their opening hours increased from January 14 by three hours a week to include a Sunday opening from 1pm to 4pm. But the work comes as the authority closed the doors of nine other libraries in the borough in June, leaving just seven left open having previously boasted 16.

Beechdale, Blakenall, New Invention, Pelsall, Pleck, Pheasey, Rushall, South Walsall and Walsall Wood libraries all closed as the council looks to save £86 million by 2020.

Mayor of Walsall councillor Marco Longhi, who campaigned to keep Pelsall Library open after its closure was announced, said he was 'pleased for Central Library' and welcomed the improvements, but added he still felt that the closure of his local library was 'the wrong decision'.

Students get the festive party started



The dancers seen during their Christmas party performance at the Crossing at St Paul's

WALSALL College's Acting and Dance students put on a festive show for Walsall Healthcare's cancer patients, performing dancs- and Christmas songs during the trust's Christmas party at the Crossing at St Paul's.

Level 2 and 3 Acting students performed a series of Christmas songs by Slade, Wham!, Band Aid, Mariah Carey, Michael Buble and Wizzard. Dance students at Level 3 choreographed a routine to the

music from 2004 fantasy drama, Polar Express, and performed another dance to a fitness inspired 80s mix. Students attended workshop sessions for six weeks prior to the event to rehearse for their songs and routines, and to ensure their performances were to a high standard.

Christine Taylor, Curriculum Manager for Performance Arts at Walsall College, said: “The students gave a brilliant perfor-

mance and their hard work really paid off.”

Walsall College offer a BTEC First Diploma in Performing Arts and a Level 3 Diploma in Dance and Acting. To find out more, take a look at our V6 Course Guide, which can be picked up from either of the college's campuses or downloaded online.

For more information about enrolling on a course at Walsall College, please call 01922 657000.

NEWS IN BRIEF

House burgled in broad daylight

A HOUSE in Walsall has been burgled in broad daylight. The home, in Churston Close, Bloxwich, was targeted between 2.50-4.30pm on Wednesday, November 29.

Offenders gained access to the rear garden before using an implement to force open a conservatory door.

The home was then searched from top to bottom with a number of items being stolen. An alarm activated but did not seem to deter the burglars.

Kevin Pitt, from West Midlands Police, said: “If you have any information about the incident please call our non emergency number 101, quoting the reference number 20WS/258656R/17.”

Council gets tough on rogue schemes

PEOPLE who break planning regulations in Walsall are set to face tougher punishment as the council looks to implement a new approach to tackling rogue developments.

A new approach to tackling people who breach planning regulations in Walsall is set to be introduced imminently.

Breaches of planning law include failing to comply with planning conditions and the undertaking of unauthorised development.

The plan will also help the council to target untidy properties.

Business backing for festive float

A CHRISTMAS float which raises money for charity each year has been boosted by the sponsorship of a Staffordshire building firm.

Cameron Homes, based in Chase-town, has provided backing for the Burntwood Rotary Club initiative.

The club drives the vehicle around the town each year, giving children the chance to meet Santa and collecting money at the same time for good causes. Tony Spencer, of Burntwood Rotary Club, said the donation, “has enabled us to ensure the Santa float is brightly lit and newly decorated.”

Another car left to defrost is stolen

ANOTHER car has been stolen while the owner left the engine running to defrost the windows.

The vehicle was driven off from an address in Sunnybank Close, Streetly, last Thursday. It comes after three incidents in Walsall the previous week including one on Bridle Lane, Streetly, and two in Willenhall on Trentham Avenue and another on Harlech Close.

West Midlands Police warn people not leave their cars unattended.

IN MY VIEW

with Mark Andrews



Food critic needs to Shed his prejudices

YEARS ago, a long-haired food critic named Jay Rayner gave his verdict on the culinary tastes of Black Country folk. His summary is best described as withering.

He said there was not a single good place to eat in the Black Country "because the local population doesn't want good food." A bit harsh, I thought, but at the time put it down to regional differences in taste. With the proviso, of course, that cosmopolitan liberal London tastes are superior to those of the rest of the country.

What Mr Rayner did not really express, though, was what his precise taste was. He told us he didn't like cow pie from a pub in Netherton, which he said was "not quite the a***hole of the world, but bloody close". But he didn't say what type of food he did like. Well he has now.

Recently he took to Twitter to share his thoughts on an achingly trendy new restaurant in south London called The Shed. He opined: "At last: a restaurant that recognises food is all about mood. Of all the shed-based experiences out there this one sounds like the best."

He added he was very keen to try out a dish called "Contemplation", which looked delightful in the soft-focus pictures on the restaurant's website.

The Shed was, in fact, a wind-up. It was created by a chap called Oobah Butler to highlight the absurdity of the people who rave about supposedly cutting-edge food, and the perils of reading too much into online reviews. "Contemplation", like his other dishes "Empathetic" and "Comfort" were mocked up using such delightful ingredients as shaving foam, household paint, plus a couple of toilet blocks to give it that special je ne sais quoi.

For what it's worth, I think Mr Rayner is wrong. People in the Black Country appreciate good food. It's just that it would take more than a few pretentious words about "mood" to persuade us to eat the contents of the bathroom stool.

That said, if anyone fancies a whip-round to help Mr Rayner achieve his dream of tasting Contemplation, I'd be delighted to chip in.

□□□

IT'S here. It's official. You can always tell when the Christmas celebrations have started in earnest when you get the first reports of the Christmas grottos that don't quite live up to the make-believe expectations.

One of the first off the block was the one at Gracechurch Shopping Centre in Sutton Coldfield, where Father Christmas failed to show up because he had been caught in snow. Elf 'n' safety, one presumes.

Yobs now believe that the courts can't harm them



Pamela Stephenson – spoke frankly about her friendship with the royals



Prince Harry – it is said he knew he should wed somebody from showbiz



Christine Keeler – virtually impossible for parents to protect today's children

CCTV holds no fear for all these thugs

THE most chilling CCTV footage of the week shows two thugs on a Tube train in London. They attacked a young man, half-strangled him in a headlock, took his mobile phone and threatened to stab him until he "apologised" for being gay. What made this incident so shocking was not the level of violence, nor even the hatred behind the attack. It was that these thugs must have known their faces would be caught on CCTV, and simply didn't give a damn. Were they out of their skulls on drugs, or made mad by religious fervour? Perhaps it's more likely that they are part of that vast feral army of youths who, having been caught and cautioned repeatedly by the police, have come to believe the law cannot harm them. CCTV was supposed to be a deterrent. It is not. The courts are supposed to be a deterrent. They are not. And as you look into the dead-eyed faces of those two yobs on the Tube, you can only pray your paths do not cross with theirs, for the cameras on the wall will not save you and the judges will not give you justice.

THE shop doorways seem fuller than ever with homeless sleepers. This is an existence which depends entirely on the generosity of people with spare cash. But the advent of contactless debit cards coupled with the plans to strip out thousands of high-street cash machines, as announced last week, means we may soon become a cashless society. And what then? "Any spare change, mate?" "No change at all, pal."

I WAS in a shop queue behind a woman who was buying 15 chocolate oranges. "It's the grandchildren," she gushed. "They all want an orange in their stockings." I guess it would be unfestive to point out that, despite the name,

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



a great fatty globe of milk chocolate laced with orange essence is not actually an orange. By way of comparison, an orange contains 87 calories, a chocolate orange about 800.

WE live in an age of entrepreneurs, chancers and wide boys. East of England Co-op has just started selling rice, crisps, pasta and other "dry goods" that have passed their best-before date for just 10p. Are they on eBay at 50p yet?

AND off to our first Xmas meal of the season, one of those events where you have to specify the menu in advance. Seriously, how many of us know, half way through November, whether, on a Sunday in early December, we might fancy chicken pate or prawns? One easy decision was to eliminate broccoli and Stilton soup from the equation. Broccoli and Stilton, for gawd's sake. Doesn't the very thought of it make you heave?

A FRIEND recalls another Stilton experiment that didn't quite work. On the menu in a country pub some years ago, mackerel with Stilton sauce looked strangely tempting. Turned out to be a curious blend of oily fish with that Stilton hint of damp, unwashed sports kit left in the locker all year. Well all I can say to that is Bon appetit.

IF the gossips are to be believed, Prince Harry said he knew he should wed somebody from showbiz just days before he met Meghan

Markle. Not because he wanted to meet someone glamorous but because celebrities and royals understand the pleasures and perils of fame and how to deal with them. This rang a bell. Ages ago, I interviewed Pamela Stephenson and she spoke very frankly about her and her husband Billy Connolly's friendship with the royals, notably Prince Charles. There was, she said, a common bond between the Windsors and the Connollys based simply on being famous and coping with the fans. And now she's Lady Connolly.

OUR changing language. Some long-term cannabis users in the States have reported unexplained episodes of screaming and vomiting. The condition has been named "scromiting."

CHRISTINE Keeler has died, aged 75. In the same week a major police operation against online sex stalkers revealed how it is virtually impossible for parents to protect today's children from the depravity of adults. Back in the 1960s, controlling your kids' access to the worldwide media was much simpler. I remember my father getting up early to hide the Daily Express, thus preventing us kids from reading a single juicy word about the Profumo Affair.

THE Great Puffin Conspiracy continues, this time on Blue Planet II (BBC1). It is rife among naturalists and its mantra is: "I can make my puffins look bigger than yours." Using zoom lenses, full-frame images and a lack of any means of comparison, puffins appear to be as big as turkeys. In real life as one wildlife tourism website warns its customers: "They are always smaller than people expect."

TALKING POINT



Why make such a meal over Christmas?

SCROOGE. Killjoy. Grinch. Party-pooper. These are just some of the comments I've had to endure over the years . . . and all because I'm not a fan of Christmas.

It seems just because I can't get carried away with the idea of buying overpriced presents for people who don't really want them, and don't find it easy to enter into the party spirit I'm a mean, curmudgeonly misery who doesn't want anyone to enjoy the festive season.

And yet nothing could be further from the truth. I love to see people looking forward to a fortnight of over-indulgence and slothfulness in the name of merriment. It's just that I don't really get why we all have to be involved.

Just this month, two things highlighted this divide in my eyes. The first was the annual discussion over when and where to have the office "do" and who to invite. Personally, I don't enjoy eating out, except when absolutely necessary. I get exasperated with the rigmorole of perusing the menu, waiting to order, and finally trying to attract someone's attention to get the bill. So that was that. I gave it a miss.

The second reminder was when one of my favourite radio programmes was cut by 15 minutes so the station could promote its Christmas charity appeal. I've got nothing against charity – I regularly send a large donation to my chosen good cause – but again I had the feeling that I was being browbeaten into making a gesture I'm not that wild about.

It set me thinking about a news article in which the idea of loneliness at Christmas was questioned. The report pointed out many people feel more lonely in the summer. It seems with all the activities going on outdoors, and relatives and friends away on holiday, a large proportion of the population living alone might prefer Christmas time, no matter how little attention they receive around now.

So, where does that leave us? My father used to say once the presents had been opened, and the turkey dinner polished off, that was Christmas over and done with for another year. In my view, he was right, especially in view of all the fuss and palaver in the "run-up to the big day" as the advertising industry likes to put it.

To sum up, I'll leave you with one of my favourite observations on Christmas which springs to mind every year. It came from comedy actress Goldie Hawn, who said "Why don't they move Christmas to July when the shops aren't so busy?"

It always make me smile, even though it might provoke a debate for another day. In the meantime, goodwill to you all.

STEVE PARLETT

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Express & Star

Selfishness of human race as population explodes

CONGRATULATIONS Gary Stephenson on his, for me, Star letter of the year 'Think about space left on Earth' November 28. He illustrates in simple, graphic terms the complete selfishness of the human race.

A perfect example is the proposal to build one million homes in the area between Oxford, Cambridge and Milton Keynes. Together with our nationally dissolving green belt this is held up as something we should applaud in the name of economic growth.

Forget Brexit and international trade, the doomsday deal is just how

much the human race can extract from our planet before it demands repayment. Obsessed with economic growth at any cost, it is pointless looking to the main parties for a real environmental policy, so it's obvious to turn to the Green Party for a courageous, common sense policy on the issue.

In September they sat at their conference in Harrogate, nationally surrounded by the rampant development that excessive population growth is creating and yet, even now, their manifesto does not mention the population problem. The Green Party do not

campaign to protect the environment, rather they exist to provide an ethical excuse to let the population rip and in so doing destroy the global environment.

I do not accept that religion provides an excuse for an excessive birth rate. As a practising member of the Church of England I could not accept a deity that, on the one hand gives us the logic of arithmetic, and on the other expects us to believe that you can get a quart into a pint pot.

KEITH WATKINS
Walsall

Women told to get back in kitchen

THE immigrant issue goes back to the end of the Second World War, because of a small-minded, backward-thinking government who decided women - who had from 1939 to 45 worked in every field asked of them from the Armed Forces, factories, the land, forests, etc - should be disbanded and sent home, to look after it and the family.

That was the thanks they got for their fight against the enemy.

After this had happened there was a cry from industry, there is a labour shortage. So recruitment started abroad; this was the biggest blunder of the 20th century.

Had women who wanted to work been allowed to, I for one will say there would not be the problems we have today with population that has doubled, NHS in crisis and schools overcrowded. This is what happens when you get 'know-all, know nothings' in parliament.

MR B LAWLEY
Bilston

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

Walsall Chronicle,
Chronicle Editorial,
51-53 Queen Street
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

EMAIL

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expressandstar.co.uk

Code of Practice:
Our policy is to correct errors as soon as we can. The Chronicles adhere to the Editors' Code of Practice, which can be seen at www.ipso.co.uk. If you are unhappy with the accuracy of a



story, write to The Editor, Chronicles, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

Stamps of approval for RNIB from star

IT'S the season of goodwill, and there's a way of supporting the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) - a charity close to my heart - that won't cost you a penny.

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AMANDA HOLDEN
RNIB Supporter

PDSA plea for help at Christmas

THIS Christmas, please spare a thought for the thousands of much-loved pets requiring life-saving vet treatment. While most pets will enjoy spending extra time at home with their families, not all are so lucky.

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Every pet is a star in our eyes, and we want to give them all a fighting chance. When PDSA saves a pet, another family stays together.

Animal lovers can help our #SaveAStar campaign at www.pdsa.org.uk/star or by texting STAR to 70020 to give a one-off donation of £5 (you'll also be charged one standard rate message*).
NICOLA MARTIN
PDSA Senior Vet

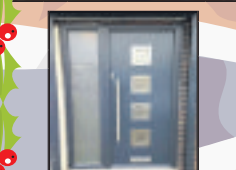
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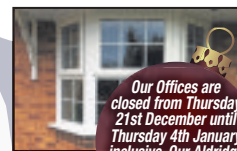
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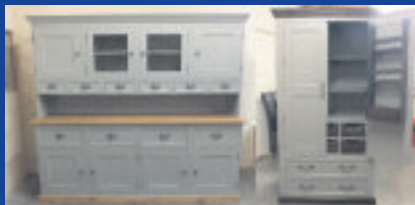
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£73k to help improve open water sites safety



Cameron Llewellyn, aged 12, a friend of Spencer's who was there on the night of his death with flowers at the scene

OPEN water sites across Walsall will be made safer with a £73,000 cash injection, council chiefs have revealed.

The one-off spend by Walsall Council comes six months after the tragic death of Spencer Hurst in a lake in Pelsall.

The 15-year-old died after getting into difficulty at Ryders Hayes Mear, sparking calls for safety measures to be introduced at the site and other open water sites across the borough.

Now bosses have announced the investment to create safety signs and pathway works at all of the open water areas it manages. They will also pay an officer to inspect sites regularly and go into schools

to educate youngsters about the dangers of playing in open water.

Councillor Chris Jones, portfolio holder for clean and green, said: "If cabinet agrees to the proposals I'm putting forward, we will be seeking to recruit an officer to go into schools and educate young people on the dangers of open water. This officer would also be responsible for inspecting our sites regularly to assess risk and arrange any works necessary to ensure the safety of site users."

Spencer's mother Joanne Fellows has previously urged chiefs to bring in more safety measures across the borough.

She welcomed the announcement, saying: "I don't want another family to go through what we have had to go through so I think this is a good decision by the council and I hope it improves safety."



Spencer Hurst, aged 15

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Nancy's sleighed by magical tour



Santa and Nancy Wallace before the sleigh ride after she won the snowman competition

CHRISTMAS came early for schoolgirl Nancy Wallace who won a ride in Santa's sleigh with the man himself. Nancy, aged six, from Walsall Wood Junior School, won a competition where she had to design a snowman at the Victorian Arcade in Walsall.

Her prize also included a hamper of goodies and £100 to spend on festive decorations. She made a snowman with a big red hat using cotton pads, piper cleaners and googly eyes. Darren Griffiths, Senior Regional Facilities Manager of GBR Phoenix Beard for Victorian Arcade, said: "Congratulations to Nancy for winning our special snowman competition. All the entries we received were fantastic."

"There was only room for one child on Santa's sleigh, but local children are encouraged to visit Santa in his grotto in the lead up to Christmas every Saturday until Saturday 23 December." Santa's grotto will be open at the Victorian Arcade from 11am to 4pm and it costs £2.50 to visit.

Homeless Christmas for 470 youngsters

A SHOCKING 470 children in the Black Country and Staffordshire will be homeless and in temporary accommodation this Christmas.

Wolverhampton tops the list with 138 children currently homeless, followed by Sandwell, with 119, and Walsall, having 116 youngsters in emergency hostels or bed and breakfast.

By Marion Brennan

Perhaps surprisingly, Lichfield has four times as many homeless children as Dudley – 27 as opposed to seven – while Cannock Chase, South Staffordshire, Stafford and Wyre Forest – report fewer than five youngsters in temporary accommodation. The remainder are in other areas of Staffordshire.

The report, by the homeless charity Shelter, warns that at least 16 families become homeless every day in the West Midlands, and with the country suffering a worsening housing crisis, 2017 has seen the highest number of homeless children in a decade.

The charity is urgently calling on the public to support its Christmas appeal. As part of its survey, Shelter

carried out in-depth interviews with children and their parents living in emergency B&Bs and hostels.

They found that every family in this situation lived in a single room which significantly disrupted the children's ability to play, do homework and carry out any kind of daily routine.

A quarter of families had no access to a kitchen, and the rest had to make do with shared facilities. Shelter Birmingham manager, Vicky Hines said: "It's a national scandal that the number of homeless children in Britain has risen every year for the last decade."

To donate visit www.shelter.org.uk or text SHELTER to 70080 to donate £3.

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Your Christmas Rubbish and Recycling arrangements 2017/18

Changes to your grey and green bin collections

To help you cope with your extra rubbish over the Christmas period grey and green bins will be emptied weekly from Monday 18 December 2017 until Friday 12 January 2018 with the following exceptions:

Monday Collections

There will be no collection on Monday 25 December. Bins due to be collected on Monday 25 December will be emptied on Wednesday 27 December. There will be no collection on Monday 01 January 2018.

Tuesday Collections

There will be no collection on Tuesday 26 December.

Wednesday Collections

There will be no collection on Wednesday 27 December.

Additional waste

Because extra bin collections have been arranged we WILL NOT collect any additional bagged waste. Please take this to one of the two local tips (Household Waste Recycling Centres).

Collections in the New Year

From Monday 15 January 2018 grey and green bins will be emptied every other week. Please check your bin collection calendar or visit our website for your collection dates

Your local tips

Fryers Road and Merchants Way HWRC's will be closed Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day, and will close at 1pm on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. Additional opening has been arranged at both sites during Christmas and New Year weeks.

Last vehicles are admitted to site 15 minutes before closing time.

Winter weather

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Thu 21 Dec	X	✓
Fri 22 Dec	X	✓
Sat 23 Dec	✓	✓
Sun 24 Dec	E	E
Mon 25 Dec	X	X
Tue 26 Dec	X	X
Wed 27 Dec	✓	✓
Thu 28 Dec	✓	✓
Fri 29 Dec	✓	✓
Sat 30 Dec	✓	✓
Sun 31 Dec	E	E
Mon 01 Jan	X	X
Tue 02 Jan	✓	✓
Wed 03 Jan	✓	✓
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Knife thug's appeal for freedom is thrown out

A THUG who sliced off part of his ex-wife's ear with a flick knife has failed to convince top judges to overturn his convictions and set him free.

Patrick Reilly was originally locked up for nine years at Wolverhampton Crown Court on December 12 last year.

But London's Appeal Court ruled that "unduly lenient" in January and Reilly, from Leicestershire, had his sentence upped to 14 years. His ex-partner lived in Bloxwich at the time of the attack.

The 38-year-old, of Rugby Close, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, argued before the same London court that his convictions were 'unsafe'.

Reilly had been found guilty of wounding with intent and possession of a bladed article, Judge Nicholas Dean QC said.

He attacked his ex-wife, Kathleen Reilly on April 4 last year because she had left him and he wanted to make sure no man would ever 'look at her again'.

Reilly complained of 'inconsistencies and contradic-

By Jordan Harris

tions' in the evidence, but Judge Dean said these were 'matters for the jury to consider'.

He also pointed out that he had been convicted by a jury of 11, not 12, but the judge said 'no unfairness' was caused by one juror being discharged.

Reilly argued that the trial should have been adjourned so that he could seek expert evidence on whether the victim's injury was caused by a knife or a bite. But Judge Dean said the trial judge was 'quite right not to do so'.

"There are no arguable grounds that the convictions were in any way less than safe," ruled the judge.

The appeal was dismissed.

Councillor's concern over 'filthy' alleys



Councillor Doug James seen in a picture he took in King Street, with rubbish in the background

A COUNCILLOR has hit out at the state of his town, after he complained that alleys off one of the main roads are strewn with litter, discarded food and betting slips, along with smelly drains.

Darlaston Councillor Doug James says King Street is 'filthy', with problems such as litter blocking the drains.

He said that people 'reel from the stench and unsightly debris' and added: "Is this how we attract shoppers to our town centre?"

"Local people are angry and have become deeply disappointed by the Clean up Services. Many say 'complaining is a waste of time'. As local businesses face one of the toughest festive seasons on record and local people struggle to find the money for their Christmas we must have every effort made in keeping our town centre clean and tidy to keep people coming back."

He called for a 'responsive' Clean & Green depot, and said services such as GSE were 'now and again' and claimed they were last seen operating in August.

Councillor James added: "I expect we will have the emergency services Pied Piper of Darlo called in soon to charm away the rats seen here after dark by local shoppers."

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Council's volunteering initiative gets rebrand

Elf happy to see festivities

AN abused dog who was used for badger baiting is set to have a merry Christmas.

Last winter, a brown Parson Russell terrier named Elf was found on the streets of Walsall just four weeks before Christmas with part of her jaw missing and wounds to her ears. She was reported to the RSPCA and the vets confirmed she was used for badger baiting, a blood sport and form of animal abuse, when they discovered a radio transmitter collar on her.

A year later, Elf has a home with vet nurse Amber Rogers in north Staffordshire and her 13-year-old, partially-blind English Bull terrier, Frank, two cats, two bunnies, six horses and a donkey. She said: "I fell in love with Elf when she came into our practice to be spayed."

"She is the sweetest little dog, but even when she's cheeky, how can I ever be cross with that little face? She spends her days playing with my six-year-old Staffie crossbreed Nancy."

The RSPCA expect to care for 19,000 animals over the December and January, and launched the Kindness at Christmas Appeal. To donate, log on at www.rspca.org.uk/winterappeal



Elf seen shortly after being rescued

WALSALL College's volunteering programme has undergone a brand makeover, thanks to the talents of a graphic design student at the college.

Previously named 'The Extra Mile', Walsall College's volunteering programme was rebranded to further promote voluntary work opportunities both within and outside the college.

The programme's new name 'Give and Take' was initiated by Gail Houghton, Student Engagement Co-Ordinator at Walsall College.

Gail and Helen Griffiths, the college's Student Engagement Officer, asked Graphic Design tutors to advertise the brand design opportunity to their students. More than 10 students volunteered their time to design a logo for the programme to a tight two-week timescale.

David Parkins, met the deadline and presented a design that fitted the brief closely.

The Give and Take volunteering programme offers students the opportunity to volunteer either inside the college or with an organisation or charity.

Gail Houghton said: "David has done an amazing job in producing our new logo, which perfectly represents what the programme is about: giving and taking."

Walsall College offers a wide range of courses in subjects including business and computing, creative industries, foundation learning; construction, engineering and science; health and public services and services to people. An open Day takes place on Saturday January 20, from 10am - 2pm. For more information about enrolling on a course, call 01922 657000.



David's design



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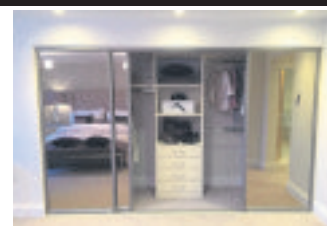
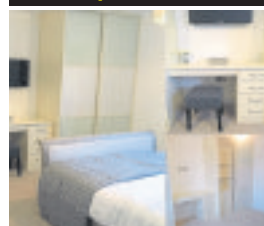
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MP Hughes in police funding rise call

WALSALL MP Eddie Hughes has asked that more funding is given to help combat crime in a letter to Police Minister Michael Penning.

The Conservative Walsall North MP has said that he has been contacted by residents in Bloxwich, Willenhall and Walsall North about crime in their area over recent months.

In a letter to the Police Minister, Mr

Hughes has asked that West Midlands Police is allowed to retain any funding generated from the growth in the council tax base in the region, that Mr Penning review the central government grant settlement for the force in the light of increasing demand for services and to allow greater flexibility for the force to raise their council tax precept. It follows on from similar de-

mands made by West Midlands Mayor Andy Street.

After making his case to Mr Penning, the Walsall MP said: "West Midlands Police has seen a 27 per cent reduction in central government funding since 2010 and I strongly believe it is time for this to be reassessed, to ensure the hardworking police are adequately serving my constituents."

New rail franchise lines up with fresh train fleet

HERE is the first newly-branded train which is part of a franchise which this week started operating in the Black Country.

West Midlands Rail Ltd, which is made up of companies Abellio, JR East and Mitsui, takes over the West Midlands franchise from London Midland.

Routes include Birmingham to Liverpool, through Wolverhampton, and Wolverhampton to Walsall, through Birmingham. As part of the takeover, the rail carriages are being rebranded.

The new operator has promised a £1bn investment in the network over the next nine years.

It will see 413 new carriages, coming into service from 2021. Passengers will be able to see staff wearing West Midland Rail Ltd 'accessories' to their uniform.

A 'deep cleaning programme' of the existing carriages was due to take place with litter cleared and engrained dirt washed away. They will then be repainted and re-signed over the coming months. Timetables are also to be reviewed with changes expected from December next year.



One of the newly-branded trains at Smethwick Galton Bridge



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Hundreds of Santas raise money for Acorns

MORE than 200 Santas descended on a Black Country park to raise vital funds for charity.

The 10th annual Acorns Santa Run saw festive fundraisers from across the region get suited-up for a sponsored dash around Walsall Arboretum, raising money to help Acorns Children's Hospice.

Runners on the day were given a free Santa suit when they turned up and then took part in either a 5km Santa Run or a 2km Santa Stroll.

Phillippa Weatherhead, a senior events officer at Acorns, said: "We're so grateful to all the Santas who turned out and helped make the 10th anniversary of the run such a special occasion."

"The atmosphere was electric and it feels like Christmas has well and truly arrived."

Bereaved

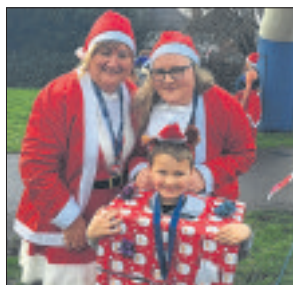
Acorns, which has hospices based in Walsall, Worcester and Birmingham, offers a network of care for life-limited children and support to their families across the West Midlands.

In the last year, the charity has supported more than 870 children and 1,090 families – including those who are bereaved.

Ms Weatherhead added: "We rely on fundraising and donations for the majority of our income, so events like the annual Santa Run in Birmingham have a real impact."

"It's not only a great way of having fun but it also helps us carry on our work."

To find out more about the work of Acorns Children's Hospice and how you can help visit www.acorns.org.uk



All wrapped up for the event



Participants in the Santa Dash



One family with their medals



The event attracted all ages

Slimmers' tea-rrific party

A SLIMMING group took the afternoon off to enjoy a tea party for its first birthday.

Great Wyrley Self Help Slimmers are a non-profit making group which meets every Monday evening at Harrison's Social Club, in Wharwell Lane. They sampled a selection of sandwiches and cakes.

Over the year the slimmers have lost a combined total of 59 stone and raised more than £1,100 for local charities and groups. Presentations were made to the most successful members with Slimmer of the Year Audrey Fellows losing 43lbs, while Robert Ricketts, Julie Shaw, and Janet Sheridan shed 28.5, 20.5 and 19.5lbs respectively.

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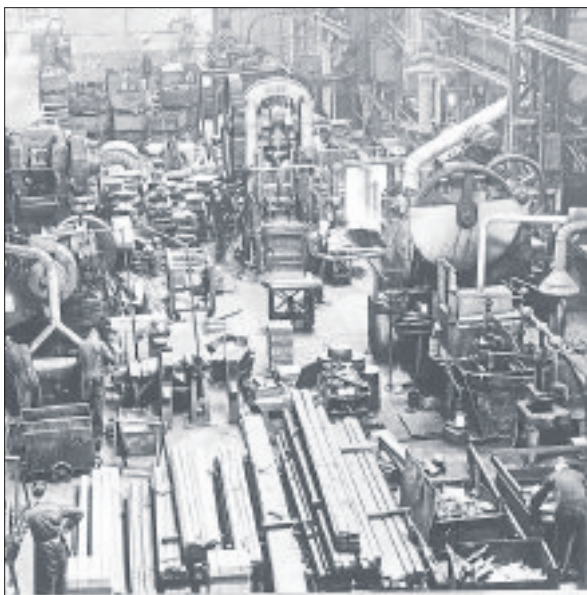
One of the precious archived images, a Christmas 'post early' message stunt featuring Dudley Zoo elephant Meena



Ken Dodd celebrates Dudley Hippodrome's birthday in 1957, and amazingly, he's still pulling in the crowds at theatres today



Chris Leggett, MNA Media director of marketing and communications and Express & Star deputy editor, Diane Davies, with E&S photo archives volunteers, in Wolverhampton



Interior of the Rubery Owen factory in Darlaston in its heyday

Archive future is bright thanks to sterling efforts of volunteers

MEMORY LANE

Report by Jordan Harris

VOLUNTEERS who are working to preserve thousands of photographs in our sister paper, the Express & Star's digital archive, have been thanked for their efforts.

The digital Express & Star Photo Archive will see historical pictures of the public, architecture and events in the Black Country and beyond preserved safely online.

The project, which involves sifting through shelf after shelf of files to organise images for digitisation, has been transformed through the help of a group of volunteers.



An archive picture of demolition work under way, the Danilo cinema in Cannock

Betty McCann, Kathy Hughes, Patricia Hughes, Christine West, Brian Lester, Ann Eales and Jackie Harrison, were among those who gave up a combined total of 260 days of goodwill

time to help organise our physical archive ready for its transition to digital. They were treated to a presentation at the Express & Star's head office on how their work is helping to keep

memories of years gone by alive, as well as a special lunch.

Back in 2014, little detailed information was known about our archive, which had become disorganised and in need of restructuring for transfer online.

So far, 65,000 photos have been sorted, mainly around the categories of war, changing landscape and industry thanks to the volunteers.

The initiative aims to carry out vital archiving work, digitise the collection and make the photographs available through a single web portal, allowing free online public access to the unrivalled images of local events, moments and everyday, for the first time.

Chris Leggett, MNA Media director of marketing and communications, said: "We have a lot to thank our volunteers for and it was a pleasure to welcome them to the Express & Star head office to thank them personally."

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Car wash owner fears order could hit business

A CAR wash owner has claimed his business is under threat after the council ordered him to remove a shipping container from his front garden.

Besnik Dedolli has run Express Hand Car Wash on Harden Road, Bloxwich, for more than three years.

He has plans to renovate it and is currently using the container, which he has left at the front of his home next door to the car wash, to store equipment. But now he has been ordered to remove the 'unsightly' green unit within a month, which he claims could force him to shut down.

The unit contains two pressure washers, electrical supply equipment and a 1,000-litre water tank.

Investigation

Mr Dedolli said once the renovation of his business goes ahead he will have permanent storage for the equipment, vowing he would then remove the container. But he said the development got held up because he had to carry out ground investigation works at the site which is a former petrol station.

He said: "I dislike it as much as anybody else, trust me, it makes the place look ugly. Once I have finished the renovation I can get rid of it. But I have not been able to start yet. If I started when I planned to it would be finished by now."

"I had to have ground investigation works carried out, it has all come back fine and I am ready to start."

"It will only take about a month (to renovate) although it also depends on the weather."

"But this is the reason the container is still there. I want it out as well. But



The shipping container in the front of garden of Besnik Dedolli's house

if I'm told to move it now I might have to close down."

Walsall Council's planning committee approved enforcement action, meaning Mr Dedolli has around one month to get rid of the container. While council planning officers added that the unit constituted a 'change of use' of the premises.

A report said: "The installation of the container to the front of house oc-

cupies almost half of the front area, in plain sight of all passers-by and residents, thereby causing a detrimental impact on the amenity of the area."

It added: "The equipment within the container and its use, results in excessive noise, increased nuisance, and disturbance to nearby residential properties. The container is an undesirable and unsightly addition to the street scene."

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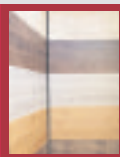
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Views of the suspects caught on CCTV cameras, released by police

SUSPECTED thieves stole more than £20,000 worth of tools in two raids at a council depot in Walsall. These images show the thieves dressed in high vis jackets at the Clean and Green depot in Pelsall Road. West Midlands Police released the images of the men they are attempting to track down.

Detectives say they used a tactic of dressing as workmen and blending in as they remove tools. The first theft took place

at midday on September 1, when £20,000 worth of tools were taken. The suspects turned up in a silver van. The second theft was on October 16, when more tools went.

This time three suspects appeared in a white transit van. Officers are linking the two break-ins. Det Con Kevin Cockayne said: "It's always best if you can contact us directly but if you want to pass information to us anonymously, on Crimestoppers call 0800 555 111."

Elderly victim of violent robbery is 'critically ill'

AN elderly man who was viciously attacked and robbed in his own home has since fallen critically ill, according to police.

Arthur 'Bob' Gumbley, aged 87, was attacked at his home on Endwood Drive, Sutton Coldfield, on the evening of November 21 and was said to be in a 'critical condition' as officers appealed for help to find those responsible.

He was found lying on the floor covered in blood having been punched in the face and kicked, before being taken to Good Hope Hospital where he was treated for injuries to his chest, neck, arms and face.



Mr Gumbley, age 87

His condition has now worsened, prompting appeals from his family and police to track down those behind the attack.

A family member said: "This has

totally devastated the whole family and we still can't understand how anyone could do something so wicked and evil to an innocent old man.

"We are heartbroken and angry that anyone could do this to our dad.

"If you know who did this please tell the police so they can be caught before they hurt somebody else.

"We don't want the people who did this to get away with it."

Detective Inspector John Quilty said: "This was a despicable and cowardly attack on a defenceless, elderly man in his own home.

"Mr Gumbley suffered terrible injuries and, despite initially showing signs of recovery, his condition has now worsened. Our thoughts are with his family at this difficult time.

"I urge anyone who knows who carried out this sickening crime or has been offered any of the items stolen in the robbery to get in touch with us immediately, so we can bring these callous thugs to justice."

The robbery is believed to have taken place between 7pm and 9pm, when thieves ransacked the house and stole items of jewellery and cash, as well as a purse that belonged to Arthur's late wife.

The suspects are both described as white, with one in his late teens and the other in his mid-twenties.

One is described as tall and stocky and the other is smaller in height.

Anyone who can help with Staffordshire Police's investigation is urged to call 101 and quote incident number 828 of 21 November, or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

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Oh what a night! The internationally acclaimed stage sensation, Jersey Boys, is working its way back to Birmingham with a festive run at the city's New Alexandra Theatre.

The hit musical has won 57 major awards, including the Olivier Award for Best New Musical, and will be on from tomorrow until January 6.

Jersey Boys tells the true life story of four boys from the wrong side of the tracks who wrote their own songs, invented their own unique sound, and sold 100 million records worldwide as Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons.

Featuring hit after legendary hit including Beggin', December 1963 (Oh What A Night), Can't Take My Eyes Off You, Walk Like A Man, Bye Bye Baby, Big Girls Don't Cry and many more, Jersey Boys is a story full of heart, humour and sheer musical razzmatazz.

The show features a starry cast of West End actors, including Simon Bailey who stars as Tommy DeVito. Simon has carved out an impressive career after starring in Bat Boy, Marry Me A Little, I Can't Sing! The X-Factor Musical, Phantom of the Opera, Parade, Passion, Les Miserables and Joseph.

He was present when Jersey Boys began its nine-year run in London and went to the first night. "I didn't know about the music at first. But I went to the first night and within four minutes I knew I had to do it. I've bided my time until the part became available.

"To be honest with you, the show is so well written and so slick. The story is fast-paced and intelligently written. Essentially, you get the same story – the story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons – told by four different people. Seeing everyone's individual take on what happened is great because everyone gets to tell their side of the story. The way that the music comes in is brilliant. It's so fast-paced. You kind of forget you're watching something. It's seamless and faultless."

IDENTIFY

Simon loves shows that give fans the maximum value for money.

"You are fully entertained for two-and-a-half hours. You just want to watch it again and again and again.

"I saw it 8 or 10 times and I became a fan of the show before I got to be in it."

The present tour features Michael Watson as Frankie Valli, Simon as Tommy De Vito, Declan Egan as Bob Gaudio and Lewis Griffiths as Nick Massi. All four have previously performed their roles in Jersey Boys to great acclaim: Michael and Simon in the West End, Declan in the West End and Australia, and Lewis in the first UK and Ireland tour.

Simon was delighted to be cast as De Vito. "Tommy is great. The thing I loved about it is that you need to find something you can identify with. I always identified with his desire to succeed. While I may not agree with him methods – but they make him fun to play – I respect and admire his desire to succeed. If you are growing up where they grew up, you either went into the army and die, go into the mob and die or be a star and don't die. Being in a band got him out of the wrong place. He did what he had to do. He discovered Frankie and it all came together. Tommy was the catalyst."

Simon spends most of his time in London's West End but was thrilled to be given a chance to get back on the road.

"This is my third tour. I did the Phantom of the Opera 25th anniversary back in 2012 and I did something at the start of my career. I've always enjoyed travel, internationally and nationally, so being on the road is great. Leaving London for a while is no bad thing, it refreshes you. I love the energy the audiences bring. We are in for a couple of weeks at a time and the audiences want to enjoy it."

Simon says the days of getting great shows in the West End and second tier shows in the provinces are long

Walk like a man – Jersey Boys will appear at the New Alex



To be honest, the show is so well written and so slick

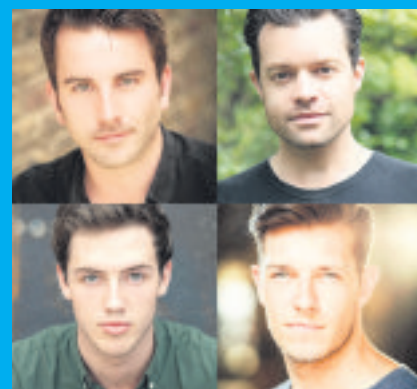
gone. These days, there's no difference in quality. Fans at Birmingham can look forward to a first class show.

"You get the great shows in the provinces these days. That dividing line between the West End and the rest of the UK is obsolete.

"I grew up going to the West End. I was very, very lucky. My parents were very much into the theatre. I was one of the lucky ones who went to see West End theatre from a very early age. One of the first things I ever saw was Joseph at the palladium with Jason Donovan. I will never forget the feeling of being in the theatre and it was so big and wonderful and magical. I was watching this whole brand new life and story on stage. It kind of blew my mind. I did a show at the Palladium a couple of years ago called I Can't Sing. I remember walking out on stage and seeing the seat I was sat in all those years before. It made me feel like a very lucky human being. Now I have the ability to transport other people and that's a real privilege."

ANDY RICHARDSON

● For more entertainment news and reviews see The Ticket in your Express & Star every Friday.



Fairy Godmother Beverley Knight



Beverley leads all-star cast in panto spectacular

WOLVERHAMPTON soul diva Beverley Knight will make her pantomime debut in Cinderella, this year's Birmingham Hippodrome spectacular.

Beverley will be starring alongside Strictly Come Dancing 2016 finalist Danny Mac, Brum panto favourite Matt Slack, pop singer and Dancing On Ice star Suzanne Shaw, and veteran comedy duo The Grumbleweeds. The show will also feature the most faaabulous Ugly Sisters, Ceri Dupree and Phil Randall.

Cinderella promises all the ingredients of the perfect Hippodrome panto – great cast, laugh-out-loud comedy, lots of pop music, dazzling special effects and extravagant costumes. Cinderella runs from Tuesday until January 28.

Other festive shows for the family include 101 Dalmations, Debbie Issit's version of the story that became a Disney classic, with actors and amazing puppets at Birmingham Rep until January 13.

Wolverhampton's panto at the Grand stars singer Gareth Gates with Lisa Riley and the Black Country's own Doreen Tipton in Jack And The Beanstalk, at the Lichfield Street theatre until January 14.

Arena Birmingham is putting on a big event panto in the city centre mega-venue from December 20 to Christmas Eve with Peter Pan, starring Martin Kemp (of EastEnders and Spandau Ballet) as Captain Hook and Bradley Walsh (TV host and new Doctor Who companion) as Mr Snee. With a cast of 100 performers it is described as 'the world's biggest panto'.

Festive music from pop to carols



There's a feast of festive music ahead this weekend and in the run up to Christmas, from pop to folk, classical to carols.

Slade get things rocking with Dave Hill and Don Powell in a sold out gig at Bilston's Robin 2 tomorrow night (Friday), whilst Midlands Hospital Choir Sing Noel in two concerts at Birmingham Town Hall tomorrow, 2.15 and 7pm.

Brum rocker Roy Wood brings his special Rockmas concert to the Symphony Hall on Saturday featuring special guest Paul Young. Expect to hear I wish It

Could Be Christmas Everyday. Also on Saturday 'the Barnsley Nightingale', folk singer-songwriter Kate Rusby, brings her Christmas show to Birmingham Town Hall. Meanwhile, '70s hits, including Rivers of Babylon, will be revived at the Robin 2 by Boney M featuring original member Maizie Williams, who grew up in Birmingham.

Celebrated Welsh singer Katherine Jenkins, pictured, performs her festive concert at the Symphony Hall on Sunday evening.

There is a Christmas Carol Singalong led by Jonathan Cohen and featuring West End star Louise Dearman at Symphony Hall on

Monday at 2.30pm and then in the evening the same venue host Classic Carols with the City of Birmingham Choir and readings from actor and TV presenter Sir Tony Robison.

On Monday night Birmingham Town Hall hosts Yuletide laughs and music when the Rainer Hersch Orchestra present Christmas No1 Pop Singalong.

For three consecutive nights, Tuesday to Thursday at Symphony Hall, A Choral Christmas features City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Choruses in concerts hosted by Ore Oduba.

Singer has home city concert date

ACCLAIMED Wolverhampton singer-songwriter Dan Whitehouse has a homecoming concert at Newhampton Arts Centre in Dunkley Street on Sunday. Dan, who released his fourth album *That's Where I Belong* last year, will be performing with a band and is supported by The Little Unsaid and Matt Sayers. The seated concert starts at 7.30pm and tickets cost £10. The 38-year-old musician will return in January as part of the city's Literary Festival to give a songwriting workshop.



Time to take trip down the digital rabbit hole

A PROFESSIONAL cast is joined by an ensemble of 26 students from Birmingham Ormiston Academy for a production of Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland* at Birmingham's Old Rep theatre, next to Grand Central. Grace Dean takes on the title role of Alice with Alec Fellows-Bennett as the Mad Hatter in a show that will feature morning and afternoon performances until December 30. Audiences can expect a puppet cat and a digital rabbit hole in this new adaptation of a classic. This will be the third Christmas production produced by Birmingham Ormiston Academy, the regional academy for digital, creative and performing arts. The creative team are led by Scott Le Crass who has directed both locally and nationally since graduating from the Birmingham Rep Foundry programme.

ENTERTAINMENT

CANNOCK CHASE

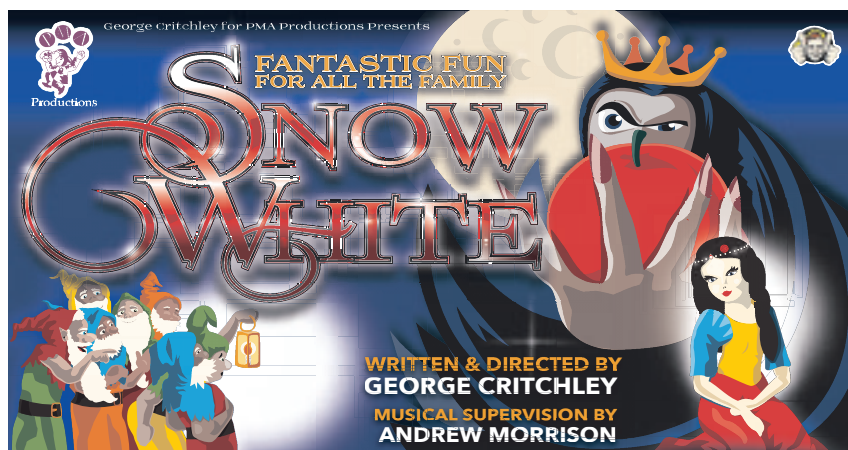
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CHOICE**Shirley Ballas****Strictly Come Dancing - The Final (BBC1, 6.30pm)**

Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman host the live grand final, which sees the final three celebrity contestants and their partners taking to the stage in dances that will determine whether they claim the glitterball trophy. Shirley Ballas, Bruno Tonioli, Craig Revel Horwood and Darcey Bussell offer their comments and score the performances, but as always, their opinions are merely guidance - the decision as to who waltzes off with this year's title is down to the viewers' vote. As the winner is decided, the rest of the 2017 cast are expected to return for one final, celebratory group performance.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** Nigel Slater's 12 Tastes of Christmas. (R) **12.00** Football Focus. **1.00** BBC News: Weather. **1.15** Sports Personality of the Year 2017 - The Contenders. (R) **2.15** Bargain Hunt. (R) **3.15** Escape to the Country. (R) **4.00** Final Score. **5.25** BBC News. **5.35** Regional Programme. **5.40** Pointless Celebrities. (R)

6.30 **Strictly Come Dancing - The Final.** Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman host the live grand final, which sees the final three celebrity contestants and their partners taking to the stage in dances that will determine whether they claim the glitterball trophy. Shirley Ballas, Bruno Tonioli, Craig Revel Horwood and Darcey Bussell offer their comments and score the performances, but as always, their opinions are merely guidance - the decision as to who waltzes off with this year's title is down to the viewers' vote. As the winner is decided, the rest of the 2017 cast are expected to return for one final, celebratory group performance.

9.00 **Michael McIntyre's Big Show.** The comedian hosts another evening of entertainment, as Irish singer and One Direction graduate Niall Horan performs on stage. Also delighting the masses tonight is Michael's fellow funnyman Jason Manford, and actress, comedienne and accomplished prat-faller Miranda Hart risks offending her family and friends as she hands her phone over in Celebrity Send-to-All. Plus, an A&E doctor is tricked into believing the theatre is actually a grand hotel as the host stages another ambitious Unexpected Star stunt.

10.00 BBC News: Weather. **10.20** Match of the Day. Gary Lineker presents highlights of the latest Premier League matches, including Manchester City v Tottenham Hotspur.

11.45 **The NFL Show.** Mark Chapman is joined by former players Osi Umenyiora and Jason Bell to present highlights of Thursday night's game, plus a look at the major stories shaping the NFL world.

12.15 Film: Surviving Christmas. (2004) **1.40** Weather for the Week Ahead. **1.45** BBC News.

BBC2

6.15 Holiday of My Lifetime with Len Goodman. (R) **7.00** Nature's Wildest Events. (R) **7.30** Naomi's Nightmares of Nature. **8.00** Deadly 60. (R) **8.30** Show Me What You're Made Of: UK. **9.00** Saturday Mash-Up! **11.00** Penguins on a Plane: Great Animal Moves. (R) **12.00** Raymond Blanc: How to Cook Well. (R) **12.30** Tom Kerridge's Best Ever Dishes. (R) **1.00** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **1.45** Coast. (R) **2.20** Garden Rescue. (R) **2.50** Mastermind. (R) **3.20** Film: Possessed. (1947) Psychological thriller, starring Joan Crawford. **5.05** Talking Pictures: Roger Moore.

6.05 **Film: Escape to Athena.** (1979) Second World War Allied PoWs incarcerated on a Greek island plan to defy the SS by breaking out of prison and pulling off an art robbery, with the help of their liberal-minded camp commandant. Action adventure, with Roger Moore, David Niven, Telly Savalas, Elliott Gould, Stefanie Powers and Claudia Cardinale.

8.00 **Attenborough's Life That Glows.** David Attenborough explores the world of bioluminescence, the often spectacular natural light produced by creatures including glow-worms, fireflies and plankton, using specially designed cameras, some fitted to a new generation of deep-sea submersibles and robots to record instances in the very deep ocean. The programme shows a millipede glowing on the forest floor in California, the mesmerising flashing light patterns of the synchronous firefly, the spooky glow of a rare dragon fish and luminous earth worms in France. (R)

9.00 **Feud: Bette and Joan.** New series. Drama chronicling the rivalry between Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, beginning in 1962, as Joan considers a collaboration. Starring Jessica Lange and Susan Sarandon.

9.55 **Feud: Bette and Joan.** Filming begins on What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?, and despite still being at odds, Bette and Joan unite as they campaign to get rid of an attractive female co-star.

10.45 QI XL.

11.30 Jeff Lynne's ELO - Wembley or Bust. **12.45** Film: Shadow of the Vampire. (2000) **2.10** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Sooty. **6.10** Bottom Knockers Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knockers Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **7.00** Mission Employable. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.10** Ultimate Spider-Man: Web Warriors. **7.30** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.35** Scrambled!: The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Fangbone. (R) **8.10** Scrambled!: The Powerpuff Girls. (R) **8.30** Scrambled!: Thunderbirds Are Go. **9.00** Scrambled!: Wishart. (R) **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** Saturday Morning with James Martin. **11.25** Gino's Italian Coastal Escape. (R) **11.50** Countrywise. (R) **12.20** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **12.45** ITV News: Weather. **12.55** Endeavour. (R) **2.55** Film: The Flintstones in Viva Rock Vegas. (2000) Family comedy prequel, starring Mark Addy. **4.35** The Chase. (R) **5.35** Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs. (R)

6.05 **Regional Programme:** Weather.

6.15 **ITV News:** Weather.

6.30 **Film: The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey.** (2012) Unassuming hobbit Bilbo Baggins is pulled out of his comfortable life when Gandalf the wizard volunteers him for a dangerous quest. He joins a party of dwarves who are on a mission to reclaim their lost homeland, which has been taken over by a dragon. When the group journeys into the Misty Mountains, Bilbo becomes separated from the dwarves and falls into a cave, where he finds himself confronted by Gollum and forced to play a riddle game. It is set in Middle-earth 60 years before the events of The Lord of the Rings and is the first part of Peter Jackson's fantasy adventure trilogy based on JRR Tolkien's novel, starring Martin Freeman, Ian McKellen, Richard Armitage, James Nesbitt, Ken Stott, Cate Blanchett, Ian Holm and Christopher Lee.

9.45 **ITV News:** Weather.

10.00 **Film: The Hangover.** (2009) Three men on a stag weekend in Las Vegas wake up to find they have lost the groom and cannot remember the night before. Comedy, with Bradley Cooper.

11.55 **Tonight at the London Palladium.** Bradley Walsh welcomes ABC, Nathan Sykes, the West End cast of Guys and Dolls, singer Gregory Porter and classical guitarist Milos to the world-famous stage. (R)

12.45 Jackpot247. **3.00** The Hungry Sailors. (R) **3.50** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.55 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.20** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.45** Frasier. (R) **8.15** Frasier. (R) **8.40** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **9.05** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **9.35** The Simpsons. (R) **10.05** The Simpsons. (R) **10.35** The Simpsons. (R) **11.05** Film: Holiday in Handcuffs. (2007) **12.50** Come Dine with Me Christmas. (R) **1.20** Come Dine with Me Christmas. (R) **1.55** Come Dine with Me Christmas. (R) **2.25** Come Dine with Me Christmas. (R) **2.55** Come Dine with Me Christmas. (R) **3.30** Grand Designs. (R) **4.30** Best Laid Plans. **5.35** Channel 4 News.

6.00 **Word of the Year.** Susie Dent is joined by a selection of celebrity guests to reveal which prominent term has been picked by Oxford Dictionaries to become the "Word of the Year" for 2017. The usual mix of inventive insults, fashionable portmanteaus and unusual descriptions have formed the shortlist this year, taking in everything from Kim Jong Un's unexpected use of the word "dotard" to describe Donald Trump, to an explosion in the use of the word "snowflake" to describe people with an inflated sense of their uniqueness. Joining Susie to pick through this year's crop of linguistic treasures are Jo Brand, Sara Pascoe, Nish Kumar, Aisling Bea, Rick Edwards and Jamie Laing.

7.00 **Guy Martin vs the Robot Car.** The presenter explores the world of automated self-driving vehicles, attempting to build one of his own and taking on a computer-controlled car in a race. (R)

8.00 **The World's Most Expensive Presents.** Cameras follow craftsmen and women producing lavish gifts with price tags to match, including a 24-carat gold-plated bike worth £250,000. (R)

9.00 **Film: Pitch Perfect.** (2012) Comedy, starring Anna Kendrick, Rebel Wilson and Elizabeth Banks. (2011) Awkward teenagers Simon, Will, Jay and Neil head to Greece for a wild holiday - but things do not go to plan. Comedy, with Joe Thomas, Simon Bird, James Buckley and Blake Harrison.

1.00 Film: Tomorrow, When the War Began. (2010) **2.40** The Last Leg. (R) **3.35** Hollyoaks. **5.40** Extreme Cake Makers. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **9.50** The Gadget Show. (R) **10.45** Film: Nativity 3: Dude, Where's My Donkey? (2014) **12.55** Film: One Christmas Eve. (2014) Family comedy, starring Anne Heche. **2.40** Film: Love Always, Santa. (2016) **4.25** Film: Mariah Carey's A Christmas Melody. (2015) **5.25** 5 News Update. **5.30** Film: Mariah Carey's A Christmas Melody. (2015) Concluded.

6.05 **Sinkholes: Buried Underground.** Documentary examining the underlying forces behind sinkholes, which can swallow streets, rip up motorways and even drag unfortunate bystanders to their deaths. (R)

7.00 **Sinkholes: Sucked Under.** Geologist Tom Backhouse investigates sinkholes caused by collapsed mine shafts, including one in Gosforth that opened up in front of a flat and led down to an abandoned mine. (R)

8.00 **Sinkholes: Sucked to Death.** Documentary examining the underlying forces behind sinkholes, which can swallow streets, rip up motorways and even drag unfortunate bystanders to their deaths. Last in the series. (R)

8.55 5 News Weekend.

9.00 **Football on 5: The Championship.** Colin Murray introduces highlights from the weekend's games, including Cardiff City v Hull City and Sunderland v Fulham.

10.00 **Football on 5: Goal Rush.** Colin Murray introduces all the goals from the weekend's games in Leagues One and Two, including Doncaster Rovers v Oldham Athletic and Exeter City v Stevenage.

10.30 **NCIS: New Orleans.** Pride investigates a murder on board a deep-sea oil rig, but his placed in peril when the team discovers a gas leak on-site is on the verge of causing a catastrophic explosion.

11.20 **NCIS: New Orleans.** Pride faces a conflict of interests when a hacker collective led by one of his old contacts is implicated in the theft of thousands of classified government files.

12.15 SuperCasino. **3.10** Harrogate: A Yorkshire Christmas. (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R) **5.15** Wildlife SOS. (R) **5.40** Chinese Food in Minutes. (R) **5.55** Access. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four
7.00 All Aboard! The Sleigh Ride **9.00** Witnesses: A Frozen Death **10.55** The Vietnam War **11.50** Rich Hall's You Can Go to Hell, I'm Going to Texas **1.20** Natural World **2.20** Flamenco: Gypsy Soul **3.20** Close

ITV2

12.25 Take Me Out Celebrity Special **12.30** I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! Coming Out **1.35** Mr Bean **2.45** Film: Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **3.45** FYI Daily **3.50** Film: Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **4.35** Film: Yogi Bear (2010) **5.35** FYI Daily **5.40** Film: Yogi Bear (2010) **6.10** Film: Liar Liar (1997) **7.10** FYI Daily **7.15** Film: Liar Liar (1997) **7.55** Film: The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift (2006) **8.55** FYI Daily **9.00** Film: The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift (2006) **10.00** Celebrity Juice Christmas Special **11.00** Family Guy **12.30** American Dad! **1.25** The Cleveland Show **1.55** Celebrity Juice Christmas Special **2.45** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records

ITV3

12.40 Film: Columbo goes to the Guillotine (1989) **2.40** The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes **5.00** Film: Mamma Mia! (2008) **6.05** FYI Daily **6.10** Film: Mamma Mia! (2008) **7.10** Agatha Christie's Marple **9.00** Grantchester **11.10** Hattie **12.55** Film: Up Pompeii (1971) **2.00** FYI Daily

ITV4

11.10 Film: The Last Sunset (1961) **12.10** FYI Daily **12.15** Film: The Last Sunset (1961) **1.30** ITV Racing Live from Cheltenham. Coverage from Cheltenham and Doncaster. **4.00** Storage Wars: Texas **5.00** Film: Paranoia (2013) **6.00** FYI Daily **6.05** Film: Paranoia (2013) **7.15** Film: Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989) **8.20** FYI Daily **8.25** Film: Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989) **9.00** Film: Navy Seals (1990) **10.05** FYI Daily **10.10** Film: Navy Seals (1990) **11.20** Film: Universal Soldier: Day of Reckoning (2012) **12.20** FYI Daily

E4

11.45 Film: A Turtle's Tale: Sammy's Adventures (2010) **1.30** The Goldbergs **4.00** The Big Bang Theory **9.00** Film: The Hunger Games (2012) **11.50** Gogglebox **2.00** The Inbetweeners **3.30** Rude Tube **4.25** Rude(ish) Tube

Film4

11.00 Judy Moody and the Not Bummer Summer (2011) **1.00** Fast Girls (2012) **2.45** Volcano (1997) **4.50** The Return of the Musketeers (1989) **6.55** X-Men (2000) **9.00** Men in Black (1997) **10.55** The Purge: Anarchy (2014)

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CHOICE



Alan Sugar

The Apprentice (BBC1, 9pm)

The two finalists take on their last challenge to win a coveted investment from Alan Sugar, with hand-picked teams of contestants from the series returning to aid them in their endeavours. They face a three-day challenge to create brands and adverts to pitch to a room full of experts - but a poor commercial and an uninspiring brand name do neither candidate any favours. Last in the series.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **7.35** Match of the Day. (R) **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** Fern Britton Meets Rev Rose Hudson-Wilkin. **11.00** Regional Programme. **12.15** Bargain Hunt. (R) **1.00** BBC News. Weather. **1.15** Mary Berry's Country House Secrets. (R) **2.15** Songs of Praise. **2.50** Film: Toy Story 2. (1999) Animated sequel, with the voice of Tom Hanks. **4.20** Blue Planet II. (R) **5.20** BBC News. **5.45** Countryfile. **6.45** Sports Personality of the Year 2017. Gary Lineker, Clare Balding and Gabby Logan present this year's ceremony live from the Echo Arena in Liverpool. Andy Murray was presented the prestigious main award in 2016, his third overall and second in successive years. However, he is not in contention this year after an injury-plagued campaign. The shortlist this time is world heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua, four-time Tour de France winner Chris Froome, Formula 1 world champion Lewis Hamilton, short-track speed skater Elise Christie, Tottenham Hotspur striker Harry Kane, British tennis number one Johanna Konta, world superbike champion Jonathan Rea, Paralympian sprinter Jonnie Peacock, track legend Mo Farah, breaststroke world champion Adam Peaty, England cricketer Anya Shrubsole and Olympic taekwondo medalist Bianca Walkden. The Team of the Year, Coach of the Year, Lifetime Achievement, Overseas Sports Personality of the Year, Young Sports Personality of the Year, Unsung Hero and Helen Rollason awards will also be handed out.

10.00 The Apprentice: The two finalists take on their last challenge to win an investment from Alan Sugar, with contestants from the series returning to aid them in their endeavours. Last in the series.

11.00 BBC News. **11.20** Regional Programme. **11.30** Ronny Chieng: International Student. **11.55** Weather for the Week Ahead. **12.00** BBC News.

BBC2

6.05 Coast. (R) **7.05** Gardeners' World. (R) **7.35** The Secret History of the British Garden. (R) **8.35** Countryfile. (R) **9.30** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.00** Nigel Slater's 12 Tastes of Christmas. (R) **11.30** My Life on a Plate. (R) **12.15** MOTD2 Extra. **1.00** Escape to the Country. **1.30** Live Equestrian: Olympia 2017. Coverage of the sixth day of the Olympia International Horse Show. **4.35** Ski Sunday. **5.20** Film: Nativity! (2009) Comedy, starring Martin Freeman.

7.00 Life in Polar Bear Town with Gordon Buchanan. Wildlife cameraman Gordon Buchanan visits the community of Churchill, Manitoba, on the shores of Canada's Hudson Bay. For two months every year, the people of Churchill must share their town with huge packs of polar bears, which gather at the bay every autumn to wait for the sea ice to form, so they can begin their winter hunt. Gordon goes on patrol with the "bear cops" charged with ensuring the towns residents - and the bears themselves - stay safe, and meets the bin-men who must dodge bears every day as they deliver refuse to the dump. He also illustrates the dangers of living in the "polar bear capital of the world" as he interviews a young woman who was mauled by a bear, right in the middle of Churchill's main street. (R)

8.00 James May's Toy Stories: The Motorcycle Diaries. The Top Gear presenter sets out to build a motorbike and sidecar entirely out of Meccano and complete a lap of the Isle of Man's TT circuit with passenger Oz Clarke. (R)

9.00 The Alternativity. Documentary about the making of a contemporary performance inspired by the nativity story.

10.00 Delectables Christmas Special. **10.30** Match of the Day 2. Mark Chapman reviews the latest Premier League action.

11.30 Insert Name Here. Katy Brand, Ed Gamble, Suzannah Lipscomb and Amol Rajan join captains Richard Osman and Josh Widdicombe to answer Sue Perkins' questions about famous people who share a name. (R)

12.00 Talking Pictures: Roger Moore. (R) **1.00** Sign Zone: Question Time. (R) **2.00** Holby City. (R) **3.00** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Sooty. **6.10** Bottom Knockers Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knockers Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dana. (R) **7.00** Mission Emplayable. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.10** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **7.30** Scrambled! Scrambled! **7.35** Scrambled! The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.50** Scrambled! Ben 10. **8.10** Scrambled! Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.30** Scrambled! Tom and Jerry: Santa's Little Helpers. **9.00** Scrambled! Wistful. (R) **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** Best Walks with a View with Julia Bradbury. (R) **9.55** Countrywise Winter Wonderland. (R) **10.40** The Martin Lewis Money Show. (R) **11.10** Save Money: Good Food. (R) **11.40** How to Spend it Well at Christmas with Phillip Schofield. (R) **12.40** ITV News: Weather. **12.45** Film: Step Up. (2006) Romantic dance drama, with Channing Tatum and Jenna Dewan. **2.50** Midsomer Murders. (R) **4.45** Tipping Point. (R) **5.45** The Chase: Celebrity Special.

6.45 The Chase: The Bloopers. Bradley Walsh presents a compilation of outtakes from the quiz show, featuring regular chasers the Governors, the Beast, the Vixen, the Sinnerman and the Dark Destroyer.

7.40 Regional Programme: Weather. **7.50** ITV News: Weather. **8.00** Film: The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug. (2013) The party of dwarves and their hobbit ally continue the quest to reclaim their lost kingdom, journeying through the forest home of ancestral enemy the elves and finally facing the dragon that drove them from their home. Meanwhile, Gandalf the wizard investigates the rise of a mysterious dark power. Part two of Peter Jackson's fantasy adventure trilogy based on JRR Tolkien's novel, starring Martin Freeman, Ian McKellen, Richard Armitage and Orlando Bloom.

11.05 ITV News: Weather. **11.25** Through the Christmas Keyhole. Keith Lemon hosts a Christmas special of the game show, as celebrity panelists Shayne Ward, Kelly Brook and Johnny Vegas are asked to identify the homes of the rich and famous. (R)

12.15 Jackpot247. Viewers get the chance to participate in live interactive gaming from the comfort of their sofas, with a mix of roulette-wheel spins and lively chat from the presenting team.

3.00 Tenable. Quiz, hosted by Warwick Davis. (R)

CHANNEL 4

6.10 3rd Rock from the Sun. (R) **6.35** 3rd Rock from the Sun. (R) **7.05** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.30** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.55** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.25** Frasier. (R) **8.55** Frasier. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.30** Paul Hollywood: A Baker's Life. (R) **1.00** Jamie's Ultimate Christmas. (R) **2.05** The Simpsons. (R) **2.35** The Simpsons. (R) **3.05** Film: Jingle All the Way. (1996) Comedy, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. **4.50** Born Silly. **5.20** Channel 4 News. **5.50** Film: Miracle on 34th Street. (1994) Christmas family drama remake, with Richard Attenborough.

8.00 Coastal Railways with Julie Walters. The actress travels from Cardigan Bay to Liverpool, visiting the heritage railway in Tywyn that was the inspiration for Thomas the Tank Engine and a community that is famous for knitting. She also paints a carriage in Boston Lodge, catches the famous Festiniog railway through Snowdonia, and visits Europe's fastest zip wire and largest pet cemetery. Last in the series.

9.00 Inside Bentley: A Very British Motor Car. Documentary going behind the scenes at the car company's plant in northwest England, as work commences on a new range of 4x4s. This is the first time cameras have had access to the plant, which is currently undergoing millions in new investment. The programme features the local people and master craftsmen working on the factory floor as well as visiting the world's most exclusive car showroom in Mayfair and the secretive department where customers can obtain the latest upgrades to their bespoke vehicle.

10.00 Film: Die Hard. (1988) A New York cop battles armed men who have taken over a Los Angeles skyscraper where his wife is working on Christmas Eve. Action thriller, starring Bruce Willis and Alan Rickman.

12.35 Film: Mercury Rising. (1998) An FBI agent shields an autistic child from government assassins after the boy cracks a supposedly unbreakable top-secret code. Thriller, starring Bruce Willis and Alec Baldwin. **2.25** Film: Origins. (2014) Drama, starring Michael Pitt. **4.10** Location, Location, Location. Revisiting house-hunters in Kent and Edinburgh. (R) **5.05** Extreme Cake Makers. (R) **5.35** Countdown. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Little Princess. **6.15** Wanda and the Alien. (R) **6.20** Poppy Cat. (R) **6.35** Wisper. (R) **6.40** Milkshake! Monkey. (R) **6.45** Milkshake! Bopping About. (R) **6.50** Simon. (R) **6.55** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.10** Puffin Rock. **7.15** Milkshake! Bop Box. (R) **7.20** Fireman Sam. (R) **7.35** Olly the Little White Van. (R) **7.50** Blaze and the Monster Machines. (R) **8.15** Paw Patrol. (R) **8.30** Nella the Princess Knight. (R) **8.50** Moby: Toyland Detective. (R) **9.00** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **9.10** Shimmer and Shine. (R) **9.30** Digby Dragon. (R) **9.45** Peppa Pig. (R) **9.55** Peppa Pig. (R) **10.00** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (R) **10.35** Football on 5: The Championship. (R) **11.30** Football on 5: Goal Rush. (R) **12.00** Film: Season's Greetings. (2016) Festive comedy, starring Laura Bell Bundy. **1.50** Film: Twelve Trees of Christmas. (2013) Drama, starring Lindy Booth. **3.35** Film: Our First Christmas. (2008) Family drama, starring Julie Warner. **4.35** News Update. **4.40** Film: Our First Christmas. (2008) Concluded. **5.20** News Weekend. **5.25** Film: A Heavenly Christmas. (2016) Premiere. Festive romance, starring Kristin Davis.

7.10 Film: Legally Blonde. (2001) A dizzy teenager enrolls at Harvard to try to prove to her ex-boyfriend that she is not stupid, but finds herself out of her depth. Comedy, with Reese Witherspoon and Luke Wilson.

8.10 5 News Update. **8.15** Film: Legally Blonde. (2001) Concluded.

9.00 Agatha Christie's Crooked House. Adaptation of the mystery novel, starring Max Irons and Terence Stamp. The son of the assistant commissioner at Scotland Yard returns to London from Cairo following the end of the Second World War, only to discover his fiancée's grandfather has been murdered. He uses his father's connections to become involved in the investigation, only to discover nobody has an alibi but the woman he loves may have a motive. With Gillian Anderson and Glenn Close.

11.00 Film: Sleepy Hollow. (1999) A sceptical 18th-century detective takes on a headless horseman who decapitates his victims. Tim Burton's gothic horror, with Johnny Depp.

12.55 Criminals: Caught on Camera. (R) **1.15** SuperCasino. **3.10** My Crazy Christmas Obsession. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four **7.00** Only Connect **7.30** Great Continental Railway Journeys **8.00** Mrs Dickens' Family Christmas **9.00** The Mystery of Edwin Drood **11.00** The Real Star of Bethlehem: A Sky at Night Christmas Special **12.00** The Genius of Marie Curie - The Woman Who Lit Up the World **1.00** Roger Bannister: Everest on the Track **2.00** Timeshift: Mods, Rockers and Bank Holiday Mayhem

ITV2 **11.50** Take Me Out Celebrity Special **12.55** Mr Bean **2.00** Film: Jack Frost (1998) **3.00** FYI Daily **3.05** Film: Jack Frost (1998) **4.05** Catchphrase Christmas Special **5.05** Film: Happy Feet (2006) **6.05** FYI Daily **6.10** Film: Happy Feet (2006) **7.15** Film: Gravity (2013) **8.15** FYI Daily **8.20** Film: Gravity (2013) **9.00** Film: The Holiday (2006) **10.00** FYI Daily **10.05** Film: The Holiday (2006) **11.45** Family Guy **1.40** American Dad!

ITV3 **1.30** Film: Columbo: The Most Dangerous Match (1973) **3.10** Film: Columbo: Sex and the Married Detective (1989) **5.15** Film: Up Pompeii (1971) **6.20** FYI Daily **6.25** Film: Up Pompeii (1971) **6.55** Doc Martin **9.00** Tommy Cooper Forever **11.00** A Touch of Frost **1.05** The Knock

ITV4 **11.55** Film: Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989) **12.30** FYI Daily **12.35** Film: Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989) **1.10** Film: Red River (1948) **2.10** FYI Daily **2.15** Film: Red River (1948) **3.55** Film: Bend of the River (1952) **4.55** FYI Daily **5.00** Film: Bend of the River (1952) **5.55** British Superbike Championship Review 2017 **7.55** River Monsters **9.00** Film: Species II (1998) **10.05** FYI Daily **10.10** Film: Species II (1998) **10.55** Film: Gangs of New York (2002) **11.55** FYI Daily **12.00** Film: Gangs of New York (2002)

E4 **11.00** Made in Chelsea **12.00** Film: Catch That Kid (2004) **1.50** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **2.00** The Goldbergs **3.30** The Big Bang Theory **8.00** Film: The Three Musketeers (2011) **10.10** Googlebox **12.20** The Inbetweeners **2.00** Rude Tube: All Things Weird and Wonderful **3.00** Googlebox **3.55** Holyoaks

Film4 **11.00** The Book of Life (2014) **1.00** First Daughter (2004) **3.20** The Train (1964) **6.05** Robin Hood (2010) **9.00** Thor (2011) **11.15** Love Is Strange (2014) **1.05** Mindscape (2013) **3.10** Close

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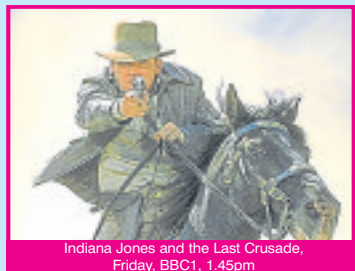
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FILM CHOICES

MONDAY
Christmas Bucket List, Channel 5, 5.20pm
 Isobel plans a storybook Christmas with her boyfriend, including a snow-covered cottage and a carefully selected list of holiday traditions, but he goes Awol and a tempting new romance turns her life upside down. Comedy, starring Alicia Witt. (2016)

TUESDAY
A Prince for Christmas, Channel 5, 5.25pm
 In an effort to escape his upcoming arranged marriage, a European prince travels to America incognito over Christmas, where he meets a charming waitress. Festive romance, starring Viva Bianca and Kirk Barker. (2015)

WEDNESDAY
James and the Giant Peach, Channel 5, 12.25pm
 An unhappy orphan living with his cruel aunts discovers a gigantic peach growing in the garden. Venturing inside, he meets six friendly insects and together they embark on a magical journey. Animated and live-action fantasy, based on Roald Dahl's novel, starring Paul Terry, Joanna Lumley and Miriam Margolyes. (1996)



Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Friday, BBC1, 1.45pm

THURSDAY
Wallace & Gromit in The Curse of the Were-Rabbit, BBC1, 3.35pm
 Inventor Wallace and his canine sidekick Gromit have set up a pest-control service, and are called in to stop rabbits overrunning a garden show. However, the pair are overwhelmed when a destructive giant bunny arrives on the scene, while an interfering aristocrat contrives to make matters worse. Nick Park's Oscar-winning animated adventure, with the voices of Peter Sallis and Ralph Fiennes. (2005)

FRIDAY
Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, BBC1, 1.45pm
 The intrepid archaeologist sets out to find his estranged father, who has gone missing while searching for the Holy Grail. Once reunited, the duo team up to finish the task and locate the sacred relic before the Nazis get their hands on it. Action adventure sequel, starring Harrison Ford. (1989)

The Gentlemen are still in a League of their own

If there's one thing you're guaranteed when tuning into The League of Gentlemen it's trouble – and as Mark Gatiss, Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith are back for three special editions this week, you can bet there'll be trouble aplenty in Royston Vasey.

If you haven't heard of the show, it focuses on some of the strangest characters ever to grace the small screen.

Take Edward and Tubbs, for example. They're a brother and sister living in "a local shop for local people" who hate strangers and bump them off at every opportunity, while Harvey and Val Denton are the relatives from Hell with a penchant for toads.

Then there's Barbara, the transsexual cab driver whose operation seems to have gone horribly wrong, and Pauline, a vindictive employment restart officer totally obsessed with pens.

But it's been a decade and a half since we last saw the boys all working together, in tandem with

their writing partner, Jeremy Dyson. They've decided to resurrect the town and its weird and wonderful inhabitants to celebrate the 20th anniversary of their first BBC show, a six-part radio broadcast entitled On the Town with the League of Gentlemen; its success led to the first TV series two years later.

"We are thrilled to bits to be returning to Royston Vasey in celebration of our 20 years at the BBC (with time off for bad behaviour)," say the boys. "We look forward to digging up the old characters - some of them literally - and seeing how life has treated them."

"It's been great fun to write these Specials, and we've saved money on the make-up budget by kindly growing ancient ourselves. Like the sign says: You'll Never Leave."

Gatiss, Shearsmith and Pemberton met while studying drama at Bretton Hall College in West Yorkshire, and struggled to make it as actors before teaming up with Gatiss' friend Dyson and devising a stage show inspired by

oddballs they had met, as well as their mutual love of classic British horror movies such as The Wicker Man, Don't Look Now and those made by Hammer.

After three TV series, a Christmas special, a film, stage show and live tours, the quartet decided to work on new projects. All three actors have worked constantly on a range of projects; Gatiss is perhaps best known for Doctor Who (he appears in this year's Christmas special) and Sherlock, while Pemberton and Shearsmith have appeared in a number of projects independently as well as together on Psychoville and Inside No 9.

Dyson has written books, been a script editor and co-created the West End hit Ghost Stories with Andy Nyman; a film version is heading our way soon.

Last year, Gatiss mentioned during an interview that perhaps when the League did come back together, they could do something with a Brexit theme, seeing as Britain had become a "local country for local people."



The League of Gentlemen, Monday, BBC2, 10pm

BEST OF THE REST

WEDNESDAY
Judi Dench's Secret Woodland BBC1, 8pm

The name tree-hugger is often used a derogatory term aimed at those who care for the countryside. But after tuning into this documentary, you may get the impression that Judi Dench would be proud to be called such a thing. For years, she has had a deep love, respect and affection for trees, and now has a secret woodland – or private arboretum, if you prefer – at her Surrey home. It's an area she created with a fellow enthusiast, her late husband Michael Williams, and one she now tends to with her close companion, wildlife enthusiast David Mills. Filmed over the course of a year, the programme offers an insight into the impact that the changing seasons have on the area, while the Oscar-winning star learns more about how trees help the environment.

THURSDAY
Joanna & Jennifer: Absolutely Champers BBC2, 9pm
 Champagne was always the tipple of choice for Absolutely

Fabulous characters Patsy Stone and Edina Monsoon – and it seems it's a similar story off-screen for actresses Joanna Lumley and Jennifer Saunders, who like nothing better than sharing a glass of bubbly. Now, they're about to learn more about their favourite drink as they head to the Champagne region of North Eastern France to discover how it's made. Along the way, they visit family run vineyards, and join the seasonal workers who are dealing with this year's grape harvest. But the Ab Fab stars also discover a few things they didn't know about each other as they share a few anecdotes and stories from their lives. And that's definitely worth raising a glass too.



Al Murray's Make Christmas Great Again, Friday, ITV, 9pm

FRIDAY
Celebrity 5 Go in Search of Santa Claus Channel 5, 8.30pm
 You can run but you can't hide from celebrity travelogues

these days. But while some have featured stars you might not expect to pop up on docusoaps – such as Julie Walters, Timothy West, Prunella Scales and Miriam Margolyes – there are others you've kind of come to expect to take part. Some of them feature in this 90-minute documentary. Actors Christopher Biggins and Sue Holderness, comedian Joe Pasquale, musician-turned-presenter Reverend Richard Coles and cook Rustie Lee are taking an epic trip into the Arctic Circle to explore Lapland, the official home of Santa Claus. They stay in traditional cabins and lodges, indulge in the 'delights' of saunas, river dipping and whipping with hot birch twigs while on the trail of the big man with the beard.

Al Murray's Make Christmas Great Again ITV, 9pm
 It's the last Friday before Christmas (known in some circles as Black or Mad Friday), which means that a lot of people will be heading to the pub to celebrate. However, if you don't fancy facing hordes of people with a little too much festive spirit, the good news is that Al Murray's Pub Landlord is back to host his own televised lock-in at The Reindeer's Head. Backed by his house band, The Remoans, he'll be leading festive sing-songs on numbers including You Can't Even Say Christmas Any More.

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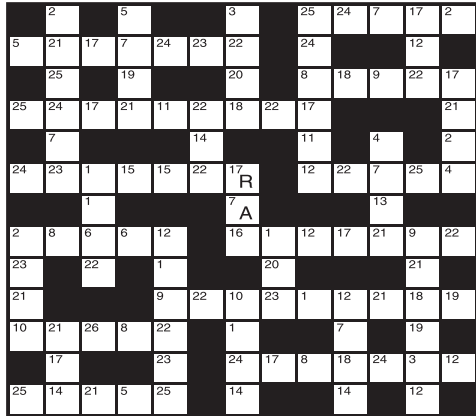


BRAIN GYM

No.460

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	T	2	A	3	Q	4	Z	5	U	6	V	7	W	8	P	9	G	10	F	11	X	12	I
14	K	15	B	16	J	17	S	18	N	19	R	20	H	21	E	22	D	23	C	24	O	25	L

1	14
2	15
3	16
4	17 R
5	18
6	19
7	20 A
8	21
9	22
10	23
11	24
12	25
13	26

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

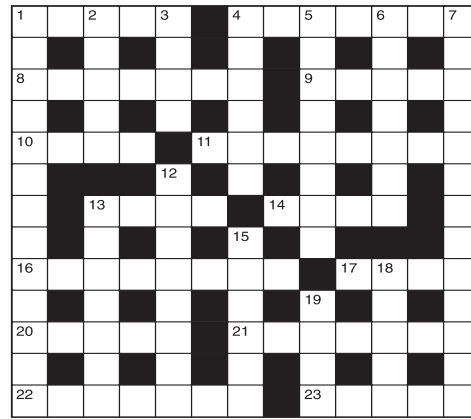
Cryptic Clues:

Across

1. A game to settle the ashes? (5)
4. Film with a good finish (7)
8. In my view, a vegetable with very good stuffing (7)
9. Best substitute for shaving soap (5)
10. The last of the wine (4)
11. Keep for a lock (8)
13. It's bound to secure advance accommodation (4)
14. Thrash in the return game (4)
16. Snuggled into a new quilt, managed to remain undisturbed (8)
17. A race to make you sweat (4)
20. Keep out of sight after a number make complaints (5)
21. Stop and go after amber changes (7)
22. The girl looks different, having slimmed (7)
23. It's the herb season, we hear (5)

Down

1. New Liberal M.P. to put up a bill inside? Doubtful (13)
2. A weapon used daily by most people (5)
3. Deceiver stood up to use abusive language (4)
4. A number finish with an alternative seller (6)
5. Public deliveries (8)
6. Titanic destroyer (7)
7. It's said to be the best place to be (4,5,4)
12. A number on a search are winning (8)
13. Attitude taken by a navigator (7)
15. Passenger-ship has a slender look (6)
18. Is in good time but nearly loses a point (5)
19. Come up against an objection (4)



Quick Clues:

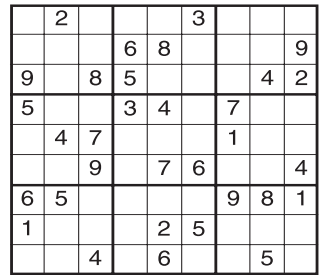
Across

1. Emulate (5)
4. Amuses (7)
8. Idiomatic (7)
9. Shelf (5)
10. Inactive (4)
11. Deep (8)
13. A volcano (4)
14. Warmth (4)
16. Records (8)
17. Separate (4)
20. Angry (5)
21. Raise (7)
22. Inherent (7)
23. Cloth (5)

Down

1. Freezing (13)
2. Essential (5)
3. Booty (4)
4. Abandon (6)
5. Traduced (8)
6. Fortification (7)
7. Resolution (13)
12. Contrive (8)
13. Charm (7)
15. Disclose (6)
18. Lessen (5)
19. Despatch (4)

Sudoku



Fill in the grid above so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

1	4	3	6	2	7	8	9	5
5	2	6	4	9	8	3	7	1
7	9	8	1	3	5	4	6	2
4	8	2	5	6	1	9	3	7
6	5	9	2	7	3	1	8	4
3	7	1	9	8	4	2	5	6
8	6	7	3	1	2	5	4	9
9	1	4	8	5	6	7	2	3
2	3	5	7	4	9	6	1	8

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:
CRYPTIC - Across: 3 Billiards; 8 Uses; 9 Capricorn; 10 Prison; 11 Horse; 14 Charm; 15 Trim; 16 Amass; 18 Owed; 20 Track; 21 Solid; 24 Tender; 25 Frightful; 26 Coin; 27 Murderess. Down: 1 Suspicion; 2 Meditates; 4 Iran; 5 Largo; 6 Accost; 7 Dora; 9 Comma; 11 Hoard; 12 Errand boy; 13 Smoke ring; 17 Steel; 19 Dogged; 22 Inter; 23 Frau; 24 Tugs.
QUICK - Across: 3 Promenade; 8 Etch; 9 Attribute; 10 Elapse; 11 Dealt; 14 Those; 15 Each; 16 Realm; 18 Roam; 20 Enter; 21 Loyal; 24 Beacon; 25 Palatable; 26 Bass; 27 Personnel. Down: 1 Sedentary; 2 Octagonal; 4 Rite; 5 Merge; 6 Nublie; 7 Duty; 9 Aster; 11 Drawl; 12 Tactician; 13 Sharpness; 17 Melee; 19 Morass; 22 Again; 23 Vase; 24 Blue.

Quiz

1. Which English king made the Homburg fashionable?
2. As which bird is the Holy Spirit usually depicted?
3. To which mountain range does Ben Nevis belong?
4. Which war was ended by the Treaty of Paris in 1856?
5. What is a monkey puzzle?
6. What was Walter Lantz's most famous flying cartoon creation?
7. Which singer-songwriter was born Robert Zimmerman?
8. In which city is the Bridge of Brotherhood and Unity?
9. Who wrote The Doll's House?
10. What is the brightest star in the constellation Lyra?

Last week's solutions:

- Quiz: 1 Carmen; 2 Arthur Miller; 3 New York; 4 Force; 5 Costa Rica; 6 Id est; 7 Tarragon; 8 Montana; 9 Dolphin; 10 Socrates.

Niner: HARMONIES

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

17235
31175678
494878

gives a criminal,
gives a second criminal,
gives a money lender.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

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Dreamgirls

Inspired by the true story of Diana Ross and The Supremes, this Tony award-winning musical directed and choreographed by Casey Nicholaw (The Book of Mormon, Aladdin, Something Rotten!) tells the story of 'The Dreams', a young female singing trio from Chicago, who have to learn the hard way that the road to stardom has a lot of deep holes and deadly traps.

Songs include And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going, Listen, One Night Only and I Am Changing. Enjoy this fantastic production at the Savoy Theatre now!

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Kinky Boots

Faced with bankruptcy due to competition from foreign sources, one small village's shoe factory owner embarks on a daringly different business strategy, ladies' shoes in men's sizes for the drag queen and cross-dresser market.

This true story, which in 2005 was released as a successful film, is the tale of W.J. Brooks Ltd of Earls Barton, Northampton, and its startling move into fetish footwear under the "Divine" brand. With an original score by Cyndi Lauper, this story then became a multiple Tony-award winning Broadway show, later crossing the Atlantic to London's Adelphi Theatre.

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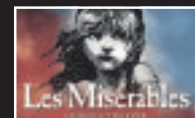


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Mermaid meal went swimmingly

IT'S long been THE place to go. When we first moved to the area – three decades ago – we would often drive past The Mermaid at Compton and it was very rare that the car park was not full.

Looking at the pub, on the Bridgnorth Road, it is hard not to be attracted to it. In the summer months the vast covering of the beautiful wisteria is quite stunning.

But the inside is just as much a delight. The spacious car park and convenient location, perfectly placed for the West Midlands, Staffordshire and Shropshire area, with a canopy covered eating area outside for those warmer months.

But no fear now that the cold, dreary weather is upon us, step inside and the decor is just as inviting. It has a warm comfortable feel matched by the service and attentiveness of the staff.

We popped in recently on a Saturday night and were lucky to get a table because its popularity has spread far and wide.

IMPRESSIVE

Nestled in a corner, we tucked into a delightful three-course meal.

As there were four of us we chose one sharer – my daughter and I tucked into the Box Baked Camembert while the two men had the Duo of Pate and the Salt and Pepper Calamari and, needless to say, I had a little taster of each others.

Well you have to try as many dishes as possible, it's part of the job!

What was particularly impressive was that before we ordered our son-in-law explained to the waitress that he was lactose intolerant, at which she disappeared to the kitchen and returned with a large blue file.

In it were the ingredients of all the dishes of the menu

The Mermaid – just as attractive inside



Welcoming – General manager Chris Callow, with assistant manager Lizzie Johnston (right) and Emma Thomas

so there was no danger of him choosing something that would not suit him. No fuss, just reassurance that he could make the right choices.

For mains I went for my favourite, the Hunter's Chicken and it appears I am not alone as it is the pub's most popular dish, always on the menu no matter what the season.

My husband as usual went for the Rump Steak and my daughter for the Spicy Diablo pizza, it was so huge that she took some home to enjoy the next day. Having looking through the ingredients Duncan settled on the

Fish and Chips. All very good portions and beautifully served and just enough room for pudding.

Although fairly full by then, three of us were ready to tuck in.

My husband is not really a sweets man but when he saw what was on offer he changed his mind and went for the Melba Mallow Mess.

They do a nice coffee and mini pudding for £4.95 pud which is a great idea but my daughter and I teamed up again with the sharing Pudding Tasting Platter.

Well we like to share but I think I had the lion's share.

I finished mine off with a liqueur coffee – my pregnant daughter had already offered to drive. Be rude to say no.

So popular the Mermaid Christmas dinner menu is already sold out but there are still limited places for the Boxing Day meal (two courses £17.95, three courses £20.95. Call 01902 764896.

Or go to reservations opentable.co.uk

I drive past this Vintage Inn pub every day on my way to work and have always commented on how welcoming it looks. How right I was.

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PROPERTY

YOUR WEEKLY
GUIDE TO HOME
BUYING AND
LETTING

25
The Chronicle Thursday, December 14, 2017

Well-presented town house close to local amenities

This well-presented two-bedroomed town house in Kinver Avenue, Willenhall, is for sale through L&S Prestige Estates at offers over £100,000.

The property's accommodation briefly comprises an entrance hall, a through lounge/diner, a fitted kitchen, two double bedrooms, a family bathroom and a covered side walkway giving access to a very useful brick outbuilding, giving access to the rear garden.

The property also benefits from gas central heating and double glazing throughout.

To the outside there is a lawned front garden with perimeter fencing and a private garden to the rear.

This home is located close to a choice of popular local schools, excellent transport links and good local amenities.

Contact L&S Prestige Estates on 01902 606 595.

KEY FEATURES

Fully fitted kitchen

Covered side walkway

Useful brick outbuilding



WILLENHALL £100,000



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10 Personals

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With Wales teammates, from left, Andy King, Johnny Williams and Sam Vokes



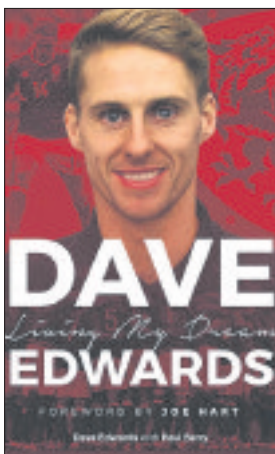
Edwards in action at his first club Shrewsbury



Playing for new club Reading against former team Wolves



Dave Edwards spent nearly a decade at Wolves



The Living the Dream book



Dave as a football-mad schoolboy

New chapter as Wolves old boy lives the dream

SPORTING FEATURE

By Tom Oakley

"Dave is always very interesting and thoughtful with his opinions, and is always happy to front up and face the media and supporters through the good times and the bad."

HE'S made more than 400 professional appearances and helped Wales reach the semi-finals of Euro 2016.

Now, Wolves favourite Dave Edwards has put pen to paper to document his story and road in his new book, *Living My Dream*.

It all began in rural Shropshire for the former Molineux midfielder, who says he was just a "farm boy" in Shrewsbury when he first kicked a ball.

Now, the 31-year-old has enjoyed a career in which he has been praised by some of the game's greats, with Real Madrid and Wales star Gareth Bale hailing his book "a great read".

All of Edwards' royalties from the book sales, released this month, will go to the Midlands-based Little Rascals Foundation.

Edwards, who recently left Wolves for Reading after nine years in the old gold and black, said: "Being a footballer is a privileged existence – it is one I have never taken for granted and one which has given me some unbelievable experiences."

Insight

"Hopefully this book will give people an insight into what it means for a farm boy from Shrewsbury to follow his dream, making it both to the Premier League and being part of a Wales squad which reached the semi-finals at their first major tournament in 58 years."

The footballer started his career in the youth set-up at Shrewsbury Town in 1996 where he made more than 100 appearances. After a season at Luton, he was snapped up by then Wolves boss Mick McCarthy in 2008.

Living My Dream is described as a "frank and fascinating story" – outlining what it took for Edwards to achieve his life's ambition.

It describes how his dedication and commitment to the game he loves has enabled him to enjoy a successful 16-year career, spanning the top five English divisions from the Conference to the Premier League.

Bale, who played with Edwards at the Euro 2016 competition in France last year, is among the footballers to back the book.

He said: "A fantastic behind-the-scenes insight of

what it was like in the Welsh camp at Euro 2016. A special time and a great read."

Woven into the story of his club career, *Living My Dream* is also a behind-the-scenes account of Dave's brave fightback, after a serious injury in January 2016, to make the starting line-up in Wales' opening game in Bordeaux at that summer's European Championships.

He is the first player from the Welsh squad to reveal just what it was like for a player cocooned inside the team bubble at the Euros. He reveals how the Welsh players thrived on and forged an untouchable team spirit.

It tells the story of a family man, who feels fortunate and privileged to have enjoyed the career he has – a "fascinating" insight into the day-to-day life of a professional footballer, according to England goalkeeper Joe Hart and "best mate", who wrote the book's foreword.

Hart said: "Dave Edwards has been one of my best mates in football, all the way through my career and this book offers some great behind-the-scenes insight into what it is like for a player at a major tournament, and some of the secrets behind Wales' spectacular success."

The book, written with the help of Wolves' head of media Paul Berry, is set to be released this month.

It has been published by St Davids Press, www.st-davids-press.wales

Berry said it was a privilege to work with Edwards. "Like so many football fans, I thought the story of Wales at Euro 2016, their first major tournament for 58 years, was a fantastic one to follow," he said.

"It was made even more interesting having worked with Dave for so many years at Wolves, as well as Wayne Hennessey and Sam Vokes."

All three of those players were great to work with, and the sort of characters whom you always want to be successful. The further the tournament went on, the more I thought that the idea of a book telling the behind-the-scenes story would be one which would appeal to all football fans."

After Edwards returned from France, over a spell of about six months, him and Paul had regular conversations at the training ground to put together an account of life at Euro 2016.

This included chats about the rest of his career leading up to the tournament, including his recovery from the injury which for a time put his participation in doubt.

Foundation

He added: "Dave is one of those footballers who is always very interesting and thoughtful with his opinions, and is always happy to front up and face the media and supporters through the good times and the bad."

"He had also kept a journal during the tournament, which provided a really good foundation for that section of the book."

"For me it was a privilege to listen to Dave talk so openly and honestly about life as a professional footballer, and that journey through so many ups and downs to turning out on the biggest stage of all at the European Championships."

"Along with the behind-the-scenes account of what it was like for the Welsh squad at Euro 2016, there are several chapters devoted to Dave's club career with both Shrewsbury and Wolves, and hopefully plenty of stories which fans will enjoy reading."

"It was a fascinating insight into the life of someone whom, by his own admission, made the absolute most out of the talent at his disposal and has, as the title suggests, lived his dream!"

Fundraising boxing nights a real winner

CHARITY boxing nights in Wolverhampton have proved a real knockout with more than £2,000 being raised.

Kaos Kickboxing coach Dylan Fitzpatrick has organised the events to raise money for the Deanesley ward at New Cross Hospital. Five such events have been held so far, the latest in November, featuring 11 bouts, and more are planned next year.

Dylan began the nights in memory of his late grandmother Mary Scott, who died of cancer at the age of 91 two years ago, before she was due to be admitted to the ward. However he has since set out to raise as much as he can for the staff.

Kaos Kickboxing operates from a church hall, in Owen Road, Wolverhampton. Fight nights are staged at Jacks Bar, in Frederick Street.

The next fundraiser is on March 24. Sign up nights are on January 2 and 22. To register, or for tickets, contact kaoskickboxing@hotmail.com or call 07772 658708.

Pathway to success for handball girls

GIRLS' handball is enjoying a boom with the formation of a new club thanks to funding from Cameron Homes. The club, based at Chase Terrace Technology College in Burntwood, will provide 13-to-17-year-old girls a pathway to develop from a beginner to playing for another of the clubs Cameron support – Cannock Olympia and Sutton Coldfield-based side B73.

Nenad Popovic, the Midlands Academy manager for England Handball and former head of PE at Cardinal Griffin School, Cannock, said: "We had a good boys' handball team and girls wanted to play. They initially trained with the boys before playing themselves and they went on to win the under-16s National Schools Championships."

"Cameron have given us £45,000 over three years to develop girls handball and we now have 15 schools involved, and recently had our finals at Aldersley Stadium where 1,000 players were involved."

Cannock Olympia and B73 are expected to benefit from the new club. Anyone interested can email scoreuk@gmail.com

Sports groups open to share of cashpot

YOUNG sporting individuals and clubs can win a share of more than £600,000 in the Healthy Communities Scheme run by Persimmon Homes.

The programme was launched in May and closes at the end of December. It is part of a national initiative to give away cash to sports groups and individuals. A host of regional prizes of £750 are up for grabs every month, with amateur sports teams and individuals aged 21 years and under eligible. The money is to be spent on sports kit, equipment, coaching or facilities.

A shortlist of 30 will be drawn up in January from all the entries nationwide. They will go forward to a national final to be determined by public vote. The winning club or individual will receive £200,000 with £50,000 each going to two runners-up.

Persimmon Homes West Midlands, which has its headquarters in Wolverhampton, has chosen individuals and clubs from its region, including Gornal Athletic Mini Minor Kickers and a Stourbridge archer.

To enter visit www.persimmonhomes.com/charity

Sport

Living the dream! Dave's career brought to book
Page 31



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Byfield aims to get back on fast feet

SUPER featherweight Les Byfield is finding his quick feet once more as he targets an eighth consecutive professional boxing victory.

Byfield takes on former sparring partner Andy Harris at Walsall FC's Stadium Suite on Sunday and has been putting in extra training to bring back his lightning-quick feet he was so well known for on the amateur scene.

The 30-year-old from Netherton, fights Harris in his first six-round bout as part of BCB Promotions' 'Jingle All The Way' event. Byfield knows what a tough customer 'Thunder' is from their hours of sparring and hopes his high work-rate will carry him through.

"Since I have turned pro I have slowed my feet down a lot and I have been working really hard in my sessions to try and speed them back up," said Byfield.

"Before I went pro, one of my biggest attributes was that I had really fast feet so I have been working a lot to try and get those back."

Jingle All The Way also features Walsall's Rachel Ball who makes her professional boxing debut at the top of the bill. The Aldridge featherweight turns over from kickboxing where she achieved world honours. She is joined by Birmingham welterweight Kane Baker and Ledbury super lightweight Alex Florence.

Standard tickets for Jingle All The Way, are £35 and VIP tickets at £60 for tables of 10, with hot Christmas buffet. They are available by calling the boxers or Walsall FC box office on 01922 651414/416.

Hosts stay ahead of Wood thanks to comeback victory

Ilkeston Town 3 Walsall Wood 2
THE Midland League's meanest defence has now shipped three goals in each of the last three Saturdays after Ilkeston came from behind twice to stay in second place.

It took Wood just eight minutes to go ahead. Paul Sullivan caught a defender in possession 30 yards out and went for goal, going through two tackles before unselfishly setting up Sam Agar.

Wood escaped when Alex Marshall headed against the bar, but Jamie Walker equalised just before half-time.

It took Wood just three minutes of the second half to regain the lead, Sullivan rifling a shot into the top corner.

On 59 minutes it was all square again, Tom Marshall crossing into the centre for Montel Gibson to head home. Then Gibson put the hosts ahead for the first time 13 minutes later, his speculative effort from the edge of the box going under the dive of keeper Lloyd Ransome.

For Wood it's just one win in five with leaders Leicester Road, the first team to beat them in the league, the visitors on Saturday.

Club still in sync to claim medal haul



Walsall Synchro Club medal winners

WALSALL swimmers were in sync to land a haul of medals at the National Championships in Gloucester.

Confidence was high after the success of Walsall Synchro Club at the Scottish National Synchronised Swimming Championships.

And they made a big splash again with Georgia Baker and Taliah Alves collecting a silver medal in the 12 and under

duets, with Olivia Timms and Kate Lopes back in ninth. Robyn Swatman and Olivia Baker came home with a bronze from the 13-15s duets and there was a silver medal in the 12 and under teams, while the 13-15 team finished fourth out of 17 entrants.

Individually, Georgia Baker finished sixth and Taliah Alves eighth in the under-12s figures. Olivia Baker and Robyn Swat-

man, both only 13, ended 11th and 13th respectively, from 178 entrants in the 13-15s.

In the solos, Georgia Baker narrowly missed out on third position in the under-13s, finishing just ahead of Talia Alves. Swatman and Olivia Baker finished eighth and ninth respectively.

Walsall Synchro Club were formed in 1972. Visit www.walsallssc.webeden.co.uk

BOSS HAPPY TO GO WITH FLO

WALSALL boss Jon Whitney has expressed his delight in seeing Florent Cuvelier shine on his return to the first team.

The Belgian midfielder had been out with a calf injury since October and was one of the standout performers as the Saddlers beat Scunthorpe 1-0 on Saturday.

Whitney hopes Cuvelier – who has struggled with injuries in the past couple of years – can play a key role in the second half of the season, but has warned not to expect too much too soon, *writes Joe Masi.*

"We've had to be patient with him, but you can see what Flo has got," said the Walsall chief. "We all know Flo can play, but I just like the fact he had a smile on his face before the game, during it, and when he came off."

"It's nice to see Flo back. We have to manage him, that's what I have to do."

Important

Prior to his start against the Iron, Cuvelier played a couple of games for the club's development squad.

Whitney – who was physio during the 25-year-old's first spell with the club, through 2012 and 2013 – will keep monitoring him closely.

"I have known Flo a long time, from when I was physio as well, and I know how to manage Flo," said Whitney. "I'll do my best to try to keep him playing games as he's important for us."

It was a deserved win – the third on the bounce in League One for the Saddlers – but it seems there are supporters who still want Whitney out.

But at the same time, there are fans who – if they see signs of improvement, and a team worth getting behind – are willing to cut the boss a bit of slack.

And while this clash – won with a deflected Kieron Morris strike – was not a classic, there are some things to be positive about as we head into



Walsall winger Zeli Ismail faces a battle from Scunthorpe defender Murray Wallace

a busy festive period, not least the fact it was the Saddlers first home clean sheet of the season.

Alongside Cuvelier, James Wilson, Mark Gillespie and Amadou Bakayoko all returned to the fold – and hardly put a foot wrong. In fact, every Walsall player put in a decent display.

They were energetic and committed, if not all spectacular. Whitney praised that high work-rate after the match and that effort was appreciated by the home faithful following the final whistle, applauding the players as they made their way down the tunnel.

Gillespie, back in for Liam Roberts, who has injured his hamstring, was only forced into one major save, in second-half added-on time.

The 25-year-old slipped as Scunthorpe substitute Clayton Lewis's strike approached him but – in a true heart-in-mouth moment – managed to swipe the ball clear.

And the major positive from the encounter was the performance of Erhun Oztumer, despite having a penalty saved by Matt Gilks.

His link-up play with Bakayoko, Morris and Zeli Ismail was very good. You sense the Saddlers will have a tough job keeping hold of him in January and it may just be a case of enjoying his presence while it lasts. Things may not be perfect at 11th-placed Walsall, but beating a team that started Saturday third in the table with relative ease deserves credit.

Joyce: I have to be more aggressive

WALSALL snooker player Mark Joyce claims a more aggressive approach will help take him to the next level after he crashed out in the quarter-finals for the sixth time at a ranking tournament.

Joyce was edged out in the final frame of 11 by Ryan Day at the Betway UK Championship. Joyce made a century break but admits he was too cautious against his Welsh opponent.

"I felt good in the decider to be honest. I think the damage was done early on in the game. I played the decider to win but it wasn't to be," he said.

"I think shot selection and experience cost me the match. We play deciders week in, week out so I'm used to that. I felt as good in the decider as I did probably in the middle of the match."

"I went a bit negative in the middle and that cost me. At 3-2 up I should've pushed on."

It's now played six, lost six at the last eight stage for the world No.42 who admits he must take his chances if he's to progress any further in his career.

He said: "To get to the next level I need to be a bit more aggressive. It's obviously a disappointment. I will look back at the opportunity that was there. I got off to a bad start but I rallied."

"I had him where I wanted him and then I let him back in. So it's probably three shots that have cost me across the match."

"I will lick my wounds and learn from it I suppose. To get to the next level I need to work on the shot selection."

League kicks off to tackle obesity

A FOOTBALL league run in Walsall to tackle obesity will be launched at the Banks's Stadium in the new year.

Man v Fat kicks off at on January 19 and will run for 14 consecutive weeks. Before each game, a weigh-in takes place followed by a 30 minute six-a-side football match. Players can earn extra goal bonuses for their team depending on the number of pounds lost.

The final result of each match consists of not only the score on the pitch, but the score from the scales. Entry fee is free. Join at www.manvfat.com/football, call 0845 163 0042 or email football@manvfat.com

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